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CHAMBERLAIN

A Study



By JOHN M. ROBERTSON

AUTHOR OF "AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH POLITICS," "PATRIOTISM AND EMPIRE,"
"THE CASE FOR FREE TRADE," ETC.

WATTS & CO.,
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20540
REF ID: A66888

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CHAMBERLAIN: A STUDY

CHAPTER I.

YOUTH AND EARLY MANHOOD

IN what has been made public as to Mr. Chamberlain's heredity there is nothing of importance to our study of him. He is descended, by his own account, from Richard Sergeant, one of the two thousand clergymen ejected under Charles II. This ancestor was described by Baxter as a man of " manifold worth, remarkable self-devotion, and singular sanctity "¹—qualities not commonly claimed for his distinguished descendant. It may suffice us to begin by noting that Mr. Chamberlain was born on July 8th, 1836, four years after the passing of the first Reform Bill, and a year before the accession of Queen Victoria; and that his father was a well-to-do shoe manufacturer in Camberwell, London.

Anecdotes of the childhood of celebrities are open to a general suspicion; but those told of the boy Chamberlain are tolerably appropriate. At school he was " masterful," high-spirited, pertinacious, and inquisitive, wanting to " know the reason of everything," and bent on

being captain when the boys played at soldiers. A story of his beating his sister in a game of toy soldiers, by glueing his to the table,¹ need not be taken as significant, any more than the record (vouched for by his schoolmistress) of his founding a small-boys' Peace Society at the age of eight, and fighting for the office of President.² His health seems to have been always good, so that his school-going was continuous, lasting in all from 1844 to 1852. In the latter year, aged sixteen, he began industrial life in his father's shop, working at the shoemaker's bench.

Some needless apology has been made for him on the score that his schooling was thus not very extensive. Spending as he did two final years at the London University School, and leaving it with first prizes in Mathematics, French, and Natural Philosophy,³ he was dis-

¹ Mee, p. 13.

² N. M. Marris, *The Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain*, 1900, pp. 12-13.

³ He was head mathematical scholar of his year; bracketed first in French and in mechanics, and " distinguished " in Latin. (Marris, p. 18.)

¹ A. Mee, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 1901, p. 11.

tinctly better educated so far than Disraeli, and at least as well schooled as Bright and Cobden. And that all four, in missing a university training, missed nothing essential to the making of either a theoretical or a practical politician is made clear by a comparison between them and Gladstone as doctrinaires and as public speakers. Gladstone's theoretic thinking in politics was limited almost solely to his early studies of the relations of Church and State: it is the others who either shape or seek to shape their political faith in early life on doctrinary lines. Even Disraeli was something of a political speculator; and Cobden was of all the Parliamentarians of his day the most systematic in his opinions. And if all five be taken as public speakers, without raising the question of the higher eloquence, it will appear that the non-academics at least do not fall short in the faculty of conveying their ideas. Chamberlain, it is true, has never sounded the higher or deeper notes of oratory: he is, in fact, not an orator in the special sense of the term; but it will be granted by any fair critic that his English (till very recently) is always sound, lucid, sinewy, and at the same time that of an "educated" man. He constructs at once easily and correctly—an accomplishment not vouchsafed to his most distinguished academic colleague of recent years—and he phrases unconventionally without being bizarre.

His father's politics appear to have been Radical; and the workshop would tend to deepen such a bias.

When, accordingly, he was sent at the age of eighteen to Birmingham, to attend to his father's interest in a screw-nail business there, he was established in democratic opinions, and this in a critically independent way, not in the normal fashion of youthful partisanship. At the age of twenty-two, when he was already noted locally as a smart speaker in the Debating Society or local "Parliament" of Edgbaston, Birmingham, he is found opposing Mr. Bright on the question of the causation of wars.¹ Bright, like Cobden, had long been wont to saddle the ruling aristocracy, not unnaturally, with something like a monopoly of the unwisdom of past politics, and to credit to them in particular all wars. Even in 1858, after he had seen the nation in the mass acclaiming the war with Russia, he appears to have held to his old indictment; and the young Chamberlain, who had not cherished his school-boy passion for peace, had detachment enough to perceive—or to realise when some one else put it—that "so far from the aristocracy being responsible for all the wars, as Mr. Bright had asserted, every war since 1688 had been demanded by the people." Characteristically, he did not proceed to ask how far "the people" had been primed by the aristocracy in making their "demands." He was not a sociologist: he was a debater. And it is here noteworthy that he was thus in full training for a public career in the first years of his

¹ Marris, p. 43.

Birmingham life, preparing himself for debate by debating in an atmosphere perhaps more charged with actuality than that of the "Union" at Oxford.

It is evident at the same time that from his earliest manhood he has had an abundance of energy. His debating was done in the evenings of days that had been filled with zealous work; for already the backward business into which he had entered as an untrained lad was beginning to solidify and to expand, substantially owing to his supervision. And he was public-spirited as well as pushful. It is told of him that as soon as he was in a position of authority he began so to improve the conditions of work for the girls and women employed in the Nettlefold establishment that their way of life was rapidly raised to a level of comfort and decency before unknown in that industry. Of his conduct as an employer in general, indeed, there are none but good accounts: he was always popular with his men. In all things, his bias was civic and reformatory; his surplus energy being apparently undistracted by any habits of close study. Intelligent without being intellectual, he craved continual mental occupation; and as his self-confidence was never checked by any practice of difficult research, or any craving for further education than he could get from the newspapers, his occupations were not abstruse. But within the sphere of primary problems his activity was untiring; and it is easy to see, in his case as in so many others, how

such activity derives from the physique.

Comparing his head with Gladstone's, one notes in him, with an inferior development of the frontal convolutions, the thick neck that stands for an abundant supply of blood to the brain. Take his profile as it is latterly made familiar by the caricaturists; reduce a good deal further the region of the intellectual faculties; and you have the typical head of the pugilist. But the face, as seen in the earlier portraits, testifies to the then substantially beneficent leaning of the surplus energy at work. It is acute without being unamiable: the will has not yet been in any grave degree baffled; and the temper has the brightness that belongs to good health and good hope.

Such a temperament, so energetically based, craved from the first to be influential as well as active; and while, with his merely average culture, he was still too young to be a power among men, we find Chamberlain seeking to be a power among boys. At twenty-one he was lecturing to the senior scholars of a Unitarian Sunday-school—lecturing not on religion, but by way of supplying to the town lads of that generation, when as yet Board-schools were not, some of the general knowledge that day-schools ought to give. "He rarely used the Bible as a class-book. His religion, he was fond of telling his boys, consisted in doing his duty to his fellow-men and in alleviating the lot of the poor. He was fond of quoting

Shakespeare."¹ As his own knowledge included something of botany, he sensibly communicated it in object-lessons on flowers; and he is credited with giving courses of lectures on history as well as on "Reason and Instinct in Animals and Birds."

As a schoolboy he had not been popular,² and all the stories told of his Sunday-school teaching represent him as rather sarcastic than sympathetic, pushing and prodding the boys rather than winning and leading them; alert and critical rather than persuasive. "He would wear his hat and overcoat when teaching, and always carried his umbrella, which he would use as a pointer." It was the future "boss" of Birmingham trying his 'prentice hand on juvenile material. Still, the fact remains that those early activities of self-expression had their philanthropic side, and that the need to act and to dominate was not selfish in its first purview. Altogether, the young Chamberlain's teaching activities seem to have lasted, whether or not continuously, over a period of some twelve years; and they were not confined to Sunday-school work. At twenty-seven, for instance, he is reported as teaching the comprehensive branches of "French and English history and French and English literature at a night-school in Broad Street";³ indeed, it is only at the

age of thirty, after the heavy blow of the death of his first wife, that he is spoken of as becoming a "regular teacher in the Sunday-school of the Church of the Messiah." How far, in the meantime, he had carried either the study or the teaching of French and English history and literature, the chronicle saith not; and at no period in his career has he shown any fulness of reminiscence on either of these topics; though it is said that in his early speaking "French quotations were numerous," and that he "speaks and writes French fluently."¹ But it suffices to note the amount of real trouble thus far taken for public ends by a man who could not be supposed to realise that he was thus taking steps towards a more distinguished career, however much he may have contemplated subsequent distinction. It will be found instructive, at later stages of his progress, to recall the nature of the bias which thus expressed itself, up to the age of thirty-three, in the assiduous devotion of a business man's spare hours to influencing what lives and minds lay within his reach.

Meantime, it should be noted that the widely-current story of his firm having crushed its smaller rivals in the screw trade by unscrupulous tactics appears to have been decisively disproved.² It is as a public man, not as a private citizen, that Mr. Chamberlain has to be put upon his trial by his contemporaries; and men have ill-understood the con-

¹ Mee, p. 44.

² Marris, p. 18.

³ Mee, p. 42. Miss Marris describes this night-school as connected with a club established by Chamberlain for his own workers. P. 45.

¹ Marris, pp. 19, 46.

² *Ibid*, pp. 41-43.

ditions of political problems when they suppose that private and personal odiousness is the likeliest lining to a character politically perverse. The kings who have brought most harm upon Britain in the constitutional period were Charles I., James II., and George III., all conscientiously and exceptionally devoted to their business, and the last of them a scrupulous man as to his private conduct. The first Lord Holland, father of Charles Fox, was at once the most shameless plunderer of the nation in a shameless age and the

most loving and beloved of fathers and husbands; and Lord North, who played the catspaw for his king to the utmost possible length of Parliamentary corruption and Imperial mismanagement, was in private one of the most amiable and lovable of men. Mr. Chamberlain is hardly that; but we shall merely confuse ourselves over the nature of politics if we seek to think of him as necessarily doubling his private in his political life. Political vice is not so simple a phenomenon as that view would make it.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY PUBLIC LIFE

It is about his thirty-second year that we find Mr. Chamberlain entering otherwise than parochially into public life. "He began all too slowly," says one of his contemporaries, "to interest himself in the public work of the town";¹ and his first steps were taken in the field of national politics. In view of some recent political developments, a special interest attaches to the grounds of his entrance. With the advent to power of Mr. Gladstone in 1868, Liberalism had visibly entered on a new and progressive period; and all the movements of reform which had been held back by the more pressing need of an extension

of the franchise leapt at once into new activity. Foremost among them in social importance, and in respect of the energy with which it had been conducted, was that for a system of national and undenominational education; and among the most energetic of the Nonconformists who strove for it was Chamberlain, the rising screw manufacturer of Birmingham. His essential object, as he put it later in stating the purpose of his party, "had been to wrest the education of the young out of the hands of the priests, to whatever denomination they might belong."²

¹ Marris, p. 62.

² Speech of December, 1873, cited in Wemyss Reid's *Life of W. E. Forster*, 1888, ii, 41.

To all appearance, he was moved by the most earnest convictions; and if a rankling sense of the historic grievances of Nonconformists was as present to his consciousness as a desire to see the people well schooled, that was in the ordinary way of his politics. It is not too much to say that "he was the most conspicuous figure in the Midlands in the agitation which preceded the passing of the Education Act of 1870."¹ In 1868, besides joining the reorganised Liberal Association of Birmingham, he was elected Chairman of the National Education League, to which he had been a large subscriber; and he was one of the group mainly instrumental in determining the machinery, if not the spirit, of the Education Act of 1870. It is necessary to make this clear, because he has latterly put forth an amazingly false account of his action. In a letter addressed by him to a Leicester correspondent at the end of October, 1902, and then published in the Press, he makes the following statements:—

Mr. Forster's original Bill proposed that in towns elementary education should be entrusted to the town councils. In country districts county councils were not at that time in existence, and it was necessary to provide for the purpose a special authority, which was subsequently also adopted for the towns. The Education League, of which Mr. Chamberlain was chairman of the executive, was *entirely opposed to this change, and advocated the town council as the proper authority to control education.*

In this matter the facts can easily be ascertained by reference to an unimpeachable authority, the *History of the Elementary School Contest in England*,¹ by Mr. Francis Adams, who had been Secretary of the National League, and whose accuracy has never been questioned by Mr. Chamberlain, or any other of its members. In Mr. Chamberlain's statement of 1902 not a single proposition is accurate. As Mr. Adams records,² Mr. Forster's original Bill proposed: "School boards to be elected by the town council in boroughs, and by select vestries in parishes." Instead of accepting that plan as regarded the country, and opposing it as regarded the towns, the National League, with Mr. Chamberlain's full concurrence, took precisely the opposite course. When the League held council, "the election of school boards by select vestries was strongly opposed as an attempt to restrict the free exercise of the ratepayers' rights"; and among the amendments at once resolved upon by the League was this: "In districts not included in boroughs, school boards to be elected by the ratepayers generally, voting by ballot."

The League was represented in Parliament by, among others, Mr. George Dixon, its former Chairman; and at the express request of the Executive Committee, of which Mr. Chamberlain was now the head, he moved: "That this House is of

¹ Chapman and Hall, 1882.

- Work cited, p. 211.

¹ Mee, p. 46. Compare Miss Marris, pp. 74-78.

opinion that no measure for the elementary education of the people will afford a permanent or satisfactory settlement which leaves the question of religious instruction in schools supported by the public funds and rates to be determined by local authorities." Mr. Dixon explained "that his amendment did not cover the ground of his objections to the Bill, which might be improved in many respects. He could have wished to show reasons for the general establishment of school boards, and for their free election by the ratepayers."

Between the League and Mr. Forster, as is well known, there was waged a keen strife; and when the Gladstone Government, as guided by him, would not make the concessions it called for, Sir Charles Dilke, also a member of its Executive Committee, and then member for Chelsea, "moved that the school boards should be elected by the ratepayers instead of by town councils and vestries. The amendment was opposed by the Government, and rejected by the narrow majority of 150 against 145. The lesson of this division, however, was not lost, since at a later stage the Government accepted the proposal."

It was thus as a direct result of the special pressure of the National League, of which Chamberlain was one of the moving spirits, that the Act of 1870 established school boards in town and country. Instead of "advocating the town council as the proper authority to control education," it fought and defeated that

proposal. And in a speech delivered by Mr. Chamberlain in December, 1873, he claimed that alike the provision of school boards and the principle of permissive compulsion "only existed in the Bill in consequence of the agitation and discussion which was raised by the Education League."¹

Such an illustration may serve, thus early in our inquiry, to show by what a road, and in what a spirit, this man has travelled. In all the records of reckless false witness by public men, it would be hard to parallel that before us. This astonishing perversion of historic fact has been resorted to by Mr. Chamberlain with the object of saving himself from the discredit of having, by acceptance of the Education Act of 1902, apostatised from his older principles on national education as on everything else; and, in the fashion which has latterly become characteristic of him, he strove, at the same juncture, to asperse his present Liberal opponents as having done nothing for undenominational education while he was fighting its battle. Of Sir William Vernon Harcourt he said, in his Birmingham speech of October 9th, 1902, that in the time of the Forster Bill "he on all occasions repudiated any desire to interfere with the denominational schools"; and the ex-Radical broadly insinuates that Sir

¹ Speech cited in Wemyss Reid's *Life of W. E. Forster*, 1888, ii, 41. Reid, however, records that both of the provisions in question "were contained in the original memorandum on the subject submitted to the Cabinet by Mr. Forster in 1869."

William took no such active part in the struggle for unsectarian education as he has claimed to have done. Yet, once more, Mr. Francis Adams's *History*, written when none of the present embroilments had arisen, records (p. 224) that in 1870 "Mr. Vernon Harcourt had given notice of an amendment on going into Committee to the effect that provision should be made to secure that in all schools deriving assistance from the public rates the religious teaching given should be undenominational in character." At every point the retrospective renegade prevaricates.

While, however, it is made thus clear how utterly the one-time Radical reformer has departed not only from his early principles but from ordinary habits of veracity—that is, unless his faculties are giving way—it must be kept in view that in 1870 he *was* a reformer, against whose honesty there lay no provable charge. We are studying what Browning has called "the tragedy of a soul"; and it is in the process of depravation that the tragedy consists.

One lasting consequence of the battle of 1870 was Chamberlain's personal hostility to Forster. That statesman, though he yielded the point as to school boards, permanently alienated the Nonconformists, who demanded an undenominational system, by the power he allowed to the Church in the application of his measure. It is not here necessary to consider his merits or demerits in

that connection.¹ Suffice it to say that in a speech of December, 1873, Mr. Chamberlain impeached him as having "thrown the education of the children of this country into the hands of two great ecclesiastical organisations, which had unfortunately been foremost in obstructing the prosperity and advancement of the nation."²

"The object of the Liberal party in England," he continued, "throughout the continent of Europe and in America, had been to wrest the education of the young out of the hands of the priests, to whatever denomination they might belong. It would be the crowning triumph of what was called Mr. Forster's statesmanship that he had delayed this admirable consummation for perhaps another generation."

Some eight years later Mr. Chamberlain was one of the main forces in the party which, in the words of Forster's biographer, had "determined to discredit him [Forster] and drive him from office,"³ and succeeded in doing so. What really makes the double episode memorable is the fact that for the past eighteen years of his life Mr. Chamberlain has out-gone Forster in everything that made his Irish policy evil, and that to-day he is in league with the party which resists to the uttermost the "consummation" he denounced Forster for delaying in 1873.

¹ They have been fairly assessed by Mr. Morley in the *Life of Gladstone*.

² *Life of Forster*, ii, 41.

³ *Ibid*, ii, 385.

CHAPTER III.

BIRMINGHAM POLITICS

ONE result of the Education Act was to widen the sphere of Mr. Chamberlain's local influence. In 1869 he had become a member of the Birmingham Town Council; in 1870 he was elected to the Birmingham School Board; in 1873 he became its chairman; and in the same year he was chosen Mayor of the city, a post to which he was re-elected in 1874 and 1875. In these six years he built up the remarkable local influence which sent him to Parliament in 1876, and to this day sustains him in his most desperate political enterprises.

If we were now to listen to the language once held concerning Mayor Chamberlain by some men who have since become his allies, we should hear him aspersed as unscrupulous, tyrannical, and bent above all things on notoriety. Whether anything of weight could be brought in support of the charges then made, it would be operose to inquire. When it is noted that his main public acts consisted in creating the great English precedent for municipal Socialism, it will be understood that the outcry came largely from sinister interests, and that the Radical Mayor may well have been an honest servant of the community. That was certainly his reputé among Radicals while he called himself

one; and to-day, looking back at his plans and his achievements, most men will admit them to have been so far "statesmanlike," whether or not the scheme was of his origination. At that time many men called them crazy; and "the Mad Mayor of Birmingham" was a familiar label for him. The explanation was the audacity and rapidity of his municipal policy.

So far as can be gathered from the biographies, he did nothing in advance to educate civic opinion by propaganda or discussion; though he took zealous part in the movement set up by a more original mind—George Dawson, the famous Unitarian lecturer and littérateur of that day. "The original creation of this new spirit," wrote the late Mr. Dale, of Birmingham, "was, I believe, due to the late Mr. George Dawson, more than to any other man.....But Mr. Dawson had not the kind of faculty necessary for putting his generous faith into practice. This was largely due to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain,"¹ ~~who was thus,~~ in this, as in most things, an adaptor, not an originator.

¹ In the Rev. R. A. Armstrong's *Henry William Crosskey*, 1895, pp. 249-250. Mr. Chamberlain was in all these matters powerfully assisted by Mr. Crosskey, with whose church he was connected.

The very rapidity of his tactic agrees with such a view. A man feeling his way to a new method or policy shows his tentatives; Chamberlain, getting his policy ready-made as to principle, framed his plan with the speed of an energetic man of business, himself the executant. In this, his first adventure, he was fitly equipped and equal to the occasion. In November of 1873 he was elected Mayor, and in January of 1874 he proposed and carried—by fifty-four votes to two—the purchase of the gasworks. In December, that scheme being well advanced, he proposed and carried the purchase of the waterworks. In August of 1875 the two Bills had received the royal assent; and in July he had already proposed his Improvement Scheme. That in turn received the royal assent in August of 1876; and already in June Chamberlain had resigned his Mayoralty and the chairmanship of the School Board, and been elected without opposition Member of Parliament for Birmingham on the retirement of Mr. George Dixon. So swiftly had he “come, seen, and conquered.” The one note of mortality in the period is the sad and sudden death of his second wife in February, 1875.¹

Two things are to be understood from this record. On the one hand, his popularity was peculiarly local; for in 1874 he had stood as a Radical and “Home Rule” candidate for Sheffield against Roebuck, and been

beaten by a thousand votes. On the other hand, the rapidity of his municipal success, where he had a strong practical case, goes far to explain the confidence with which in later years he has sought to carry great and nebulous schemes of national politics by sudden rushes. Naturally he reasoned from his success in his own business and in his municipal policy to his capacity for similar success in whatever political schemes he took up—a sufficiently serious miscalculation of the nature of the great political forces. Beside his more distinctively moral shortcomings, if we are to understand him fully, is to be noted this intellectual miscarriage. He had succeeded in business because there he lived in first-hand touch with all the facts, and could apply his energy with due knowledge; and it was the same with his schemes of municipal reform, which further were outlined for him by men of larger judgment. He had, in fact, the kind of intellectual calibre which only on such first-hand experience and stimulus could reason with security. It is when he undertakes on his own mental resources to solve the nation's problems as promptly as he had solved some of Birmingham's on lines laid down by other men, that we realise the difference between such a man's handling of matters which he knows by daily contact, and his handling of those which he knows only by reading, testimony, and inference. Judgment adequate to the former order of problems very commonly fails to master the second; and Mr. Chamberlain will be found

¹ On this occasion he proposed to resign the Mayoralty, but the Council would not accede.

to conform to the common rule. To think of him as a "great man" (so he has been styled by Mr. Balfour) is to make the vital mistake of overlooking the facts in question.

To say this, however, is not to make light of his Birmingham achievement, which in its own way is memorable. He found the Midland capital a squalid city, with no public buildings worth notice, with a great slum area, and ill-paved, ill-lighted, and worse-drained streets. Gas was dear and water scanty, the Water Company's supply going only on three days of the week, while on the others there was sold by water-carts a dubious fluid from insanitary wells. The annual death-rate was thirty per 1,000, and zymotic diseases were endemic. All this his policy changed, at the same time enriching the city. It acquired handsome buildings, new streets, cheap gas and water, with a surplus revenue to boot; and the death-rate has fallen to twenty per 1,000. It is on record, too, that when desirable property came into the market shortly before the Improvement Act had created the powers to purchase it from public funds, Mr. Chamberlain advanced £10,000, and induced other rich men to help likewise. Finally, inasmuch as the re-built areas will lapse to the Corporation at the end of the seventy-five years' leases on which they were transferred, the city will about 1950 begin to derive a great revenue from its own land. The friends of Mr. Chamberlain had better make the most of it all: it is probably his only enduring title to good fame.

When, in 1880, he had withdrawn altogether from the Town Council, he thus delivered himself:—

I will confess to you that I am so parochially-minded that I look with greater satisfaction to our annexation of the gas and of the water, to our scientific frontier in the improvement area, than I do to the results of that Imperial policy which has given us Cyprus and the Transvaal; and I am prouder of having been engaged with you in warring against ignorance and disease and crime in Birmingham than if I had been the author of the Zulu war, or had instigated the invasion of Afghanistan.

Could he have lived in that faith, his fate had been happier. But it was not given to him to shape his life by high principles. Even as Mayor he had to adjust some of his ideals to his place and his personal ambitions; and, in an increasing degree of precision, that will be found to be the summary of his whole subsequent career.

One of the more disinterested of his convictions up to his early thirties was his republicanism. In September of 1870, on the fall of Napoleon III., he seconded a resolution of sympathy with the French Republic, remarking among other things that a republic was bound to come about in England.¹ In November of 1872 he attended a conference on electoral reform at St. James's Hall as the unofficial representative of the Birmingham Republican Club, of which he was not a member, and he did not hesitate to take the chair. In the same month he and his friends,

¹ *See*, p. 20.

Jesse Collings and George Dixon, M.P., wrote to the Birmingham Republican Club, "approving of the movement and offering to subscribe."

Between this attitude and that which he took when he had occasion formally to propose the Queen's health in December of the same year there was no inconsistency. "Very few intelligent people," he observed, "did not hold" that a republic was the ideal government for a free and enlightened people; and to that form the European nations in general were "surely and not very slowly tending"; but he did not propose to agitate against the existing arrangement merely in order to change a name.¹ And when, in 1874, the municipality had to entertain the Prince and Princess of Wales, Chamberlain as Mayor was of course tactful and courtly, to the loudly expressed surprise of those very normal persons in whose minds

advanced opinions always suggest explosive manners. But the speedy end of it all was that republicanism disappeared from the list of Chamberlain's doctrines.

It was the first of many such disappearances. No more than the less advanced Liberals of his day was he minded to hold up an intellectual ideal in politics, or to guide men by reason towards a goal to which they were not goaded by their immediate interests and passions. The note of his career was to be not a gospel, but a campaign for power; not persuasion, but strategy and compulsion; not education, but combination of fighting forces—with so much of moral appeal as would serve to get the forces together. Of all such policies the Nemesis is the inevitable disruption of the forces so combined; and in no leader's career has the penalty been more fatally exacted than in Chamberlain's.

CHAPTER IV.

CAUCUS-MAKING

WHEN he first became a prominent figure in national politics, Mr. Chamberlain's personality was above all things associated with "the Caucus," otherwise the National Federation of Liberal Societies. Here, too, however, his national action grew out of his Birmingham conditions; and

here again he was not the originator of the policy to which he gave effect. It was in 1868, when Birmingham had been made a three-cornered constituency by the Reform Bill of 1867, that Liberals were led to adopt a plan of concerted voting, whereby they could carry all three seats

¹ Mee, p. 21.

instead of leaving one to the minority.—Of this plan the author was Mr. W. Harris, “architect, man of letters, and secretary of the Birmingham Liberal Association.” It consisted (1) in creating a popularly-elected body of party representatives, who selected three Parliamentary candidates, and (2) in arranging that the Liberal electors in the different wards should be directed so to allot their two votes that their majority should be properly spread over the three names. The three candidates were duly elected; and political organisation in Britain entered on a new era. Previously there had been “Registration Associations,” which had similar aims; but the new Birmingham plan, framed to meet a new need, was destined to grow far beyond their limits.

In 1870 it was employed to secure a Radical majority on the new School Board, but this time it failed: the voting power was not sufficient, nor was the party sufficiently united; and the Liberal Association broke up, only, however, to be re-constituted in 1873, when Mr. Chamberlain began to develop his influence in the Town Council. It carefully elaborated the Harris scheme of popular choice, creating in particular “the Six Hundred”; and it had Mr. Schnadhorst for its secretary. The party association acted alike in municipal and in Parliamentary matters; and according to M. Ostrogorski, who has made an extensive personal investigation of the history of the Caucus, the Association did its utmost to keep Conservatives not

only out of the Town Council, but “from every position in the local government, from every representative body even of a non-political character, from charitable institutions, from the governing boards of schools.”¹ M. Ostrogorski goes further, and alleges that the original Birmingham Caucus pursued the Conservatives into their own ground.

Referring to them invariably as “the enemy,” the Liberals set the populace at them, and made it resort to violence. Bands of adherents of the Liberal Association broke into the Conservative meetings, and created disturbances in them. This was carried on so methodically that the Conservatives were obliged to give up holding public meetings in Birmingham. These rowdies did not receive formal orders from the Liberal Association, but the latter did nothing to stop them; and it was considered an accomplice in, if not an instigator of, the disorderly proceedings of which its opponents were the victims.²

The very wording of this passage betrays exaggeration; in one sentence the Liberal leaders are said to “set the populace at” the Tories, and “make it resort to violence”; in another they merely “did nothing to stop” certain rowdies who rioted “methodically.” But while we must here as often elsewhere discount M. Ostrogorski’s statements, we seem forced to acknowledge in the early tactics of the Birmingham Caucus a forecast of the Aston Riots of a later time. And it is impossible to ignore

¹ *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties*, Eng. trans., 1902, i, 169–170.

² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

the historian's further specific allegations as to the fashion in which Chamberlain and Mr. Schnadhorst furthered the adoption of the Birmingham plan of organisation in other towns:—

Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Schnadhorst, especially the latter, visited the important towns of the kingdom one after another to propose the "Birmingham plan." After holding small private meetings composed of the most influential or the most active people of the locality, they explained the plan in public meetings.....Along with prominent members of the association, the latter despatched emissaries, who kept their mission a secret so as to work with greater freedom. The association had a small band of them, recruited from among persons such as are found knocking about great towns, men who dislike the routine of regular work, and prefer a varied existence, or who have seen better days, and so fallen out of the ranks. There were not very many of them, barely twenty, and they were well paid. All of them had the gift of the gab; some of them could wield a pen, compose a good "letter to the editor" of a newspaper, and at a pinch even write a pamphlet. They worked sometimes at Birmingham, sometimes in the other towns, always, of course, preserving their "incognito."

From such testimonies there begins to emerge the personality of Mr. Chamberlain as we know him to-day. Doubled with the spirit of reform in him, we recognise the spirit of domination, the lust for power, the determination to secure it by any means. It was indeed the hint of this in the avowed aims of the Caucus that set against it a number of the Liberals of the old school, some of whom not very wisely resented the

local direction to "vote as you are told" in order to secure the election of all three candidates in a triple constituency, while others more sagaciously detected in the Chamberlain methods a temper of coercion which belonged by rights to the side of Toryism. Herbert Spencer is even credited with a prediction that in Toryism the Chamberlain of the Caucus would end.

Whether or not such criticisms were justified as against the early organisation, it is not to be denied that the spirit of Mr. Chamberlain's campaign was less educative than administrative, much less an ideal of persuading opponents than an ideal of combination to crush them. And in so far as present-day Birmingham Liberals are survivors of those who rejoiced in the coercive ideal, their sufferings at the hands of a combination of Chamberlain and his devotees with the old "enemy" partake of the nature of poetical justice.

At that period, however, Mr. Chamberlain was all for Radicalism. After the Birmingham leaders had set up a wave of strong feeling by an organised denunciation of the Government's "scandalous philo-Turkish policy," they called a convention of Liberal Associations at Birmingham in 1877, under the presidency of Chamberlain, now M.P.; and as a result there was formed the National Federation of Liberal Associations, destined one day to hold Chamberlain as its mortal foe. The crowning triumph of the inauguration was the adhesion

of Gladstone, then in the position of ex-leader of the Liberal party. Opposition to the Tory Government's pro-Turkish policy, which had been only moderately resisted by Lord Granville and Lord Hartington, the titular leaders of the party, formed a common ground for Gladstone and the Birmingham Radicals, who were at one with Chamberlain in his then attitude of hostility to Hartington and all forms of Whiggism. In 1873, indeed, Mr. Chamberlain had not clearly excepted Gladstone from his sweeping criticism of "The Liberal Party and Its Leaders" in the *Fortnightly Review*; but in Parliament it was against Hartington that he rebelled; and to obtain from Gladstone an endorsement of the new Caucus, on the evening of the day of its formation, was a triumph indeed. In the course of the year the chief more than once repeated his blessing of the "Birmingham plan." "It is admirable," he declared, "it is

sound, it is just, it is liberal; it is popular."¹ All things seemed to work together for the good of Radicalism, and of Chamberlain as its prophet. And yet not ten years were to elapse before the Radical prophet was joining hands with the Whig leader to overthrow and keep down the great sponsor of the Liberal Federation, and that Federation with him.

To understand that evolution, as regards Chamberlain, is the gist of our problem. Part of the solution has already hinted itself; but an impartial inquiry must proceed tentatively up to the actual rupture. Suffice it here to say that though already there were good Liberals—some of them good Liberals still—who had a firm personal impression that the Birmingham leader was above all things bent on his own advancement, to no politician had it yet occurred to predict his entire abandonment of his so zealously-proclaimed opinions and ideals.

CHAPTER V.

MEMBERSHIP

IN 1876 Chamberlain passed from the arena where he had so swiftly triumphed to that which has tamed so many ambitions, dulled so many hopes, and turned to lassitude so many enthusiasms. In the House

of Commons he had to measure himself against men who were also locally eminent—the firsts in the nation's general competition lists—as well as the much larger body who stand for the chances of hereditary

¹ Speech at Nottingham, September 27th, 1877.

and acquired wealth. It tells of his courage that he soon set himself unhesitatingly abreast of the former. After judiciously waiting six weeks to take his bearings, he made his maiden speech on August 4th, 1876, on the Education Bill of that year;¹ and, without forcing the pace, he soon became one of the familiar figures of the House.

One of his more important early appearances was made in another of the causes which he confidently took up at that period—the Gothenburg licensing system. In January of 1877 he proposed to the Birmingham Town Council that they should ask for powers to make a local public-house experiment of the kind, and his motion was carried by 40 votes to 10. Later in the year he gave evidence before the House of Lords Committee on the matter; and he made a speech on it in the House of Commons, to which Gladstone is said to have listened closely.² It appears that the plan had been brought to his notice by others, and that he then personally studied its operation at Gothenburg, becoming at once an enthusiast. But ere long the whole movement had come to nothing. As Chamberlain later explained to his constituents,³ the temperance party resisted the Gothenburg plan, and this sufficed to turn him from his purpose.

The episode is typical. It is not to be disputed that, when a statesman sees one of his subsidiary

schemes rejected by those to whom he had looked for special support, he does well to readjust his programme. But in Chamberlain's record we shall find hardly anything but such readjustments; and the inference is irresistible that he is not strictly a statesman at all. When we compare with his series of false starts, say, Gladstone's course after 1886, we realise the difference between one who, with all his errors, was a great democratic leader, inspired by convictions, and one who, with all his air of reforming energy and audacity, has in that regard only trimmed his sails to opinion, and has been persistent only on one line of negation and resistance, in concert with the mass of the Conservative party. Gladstone, in his old age, fought for six strenuous years the whole power of a furious coalition of Conservatism and seceding Liberalism, and in that time turned a minority into a majority. Chamberlain has never persisted long in any constructive plan or ideal for which he saw no prospect of a speedy triumph. His present campaign is the longest he ever made in the teeth of general opposition.

The inference must be that his early reforming purposes were less convictions than prejudices, held not thoughtfully and intellectually, but as a result of his surroundings, and therefore modifiable into new prejudices by new surroundings. Gladstone, indeed, was not an original or scientific political thinker in the sense of one who sequently thinks out political problems, and

¹ B. C. Skottowe, *The Life of the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain*, 1885, p. 29; Mee, p. 63.

² Marris, p. 153.

³ *Ibid.*

knows his course in advance: he too, as he once confessed, was long moulded by his upbringing and environment. But when Gladstone did grapple freshly with a concrete problem and shape a plan, good or otherwise, he held it at once with his intelligence and with his conscience. In point of mere force of will he was enduring and indomitable, whereas Chamberlain is spasmodic and vacillating; but in Gladstone's case the will had further a firm root in moral conviction, where that of his junior, we can now see on retrospect, grew in the shifting sands of passion. It is thus a deadly proof of the essential moral blindness of the mass of the Unionists, so-called, that while they declared against Gladstone as a demagogue of unstable character, they threw in their lot with a party in which Chamberlain was to become the main fighting factor, and in which stability of character and judgment was from the first represented mainly by Hartington, a mind of the third order.

For ten years of his Parliamentary life, however, Chamberlain's passions and prejudices kept him on the line of aggressive Radicalism. At an early date he revolted against the moderate Whiggism of Hartington, to whom Gladstone had at that time resigned the leadership of the party in the House of Commons. "The late leader of the Liberal party" was Chamberlain's fling at Hartington in a debate on the question of flogging in the army. On the education question he was still full of fight. In his article on "Free Schools" in January

of 1877 he insists on the principle "that no grant of national or local funds shall be made to any school a majority of whose managing body does not consist of representatives elected by the district for the purpose"; and when in the course of the year he and his colleagues dissolved the National Education League, they suggested in their circular that its work should henceforth be done by the Liberal Associations which were rapidly coming to the front, and which were about to be co-ordinated, as we have seen, in the National Liberal Federation.

On international issues his Radicalism was no less pronounced. In the crusade led by Gladstone against the pro-Turkish policy of Beaconsfield, he was one of the most zealous. His speech in the debate of May, 1877, would be pleasant reading to some of his present coadjutors; and in the debate on the Treaty of Berlin (August 1st, 1878) he denounced that arrangement without stint. To the policy of Sir Bartle Frere in South Africa he meted the same measure.

He was entirely opposed to the policy of confederation in South Africa, regarding it as utterly impossible; and he considered that the recall of Sir Bartle Frere and the reversal of his policy were absolutely essential to the re-establishment of peace.....The secret of the continual troubles in South Africa really lay in the unwise conduct we had so long pursued with regard to the native tribes. This simply amounted to a policy of continual cruelty and aggression on the part of the colonists.....The obvious tendency of this [the Government's] policy was to encourage

a grasping, greedy spirit among the colonists, to foster a feeling of dislike and distrust among the nations, and to produce continual friction leading to constant war.¹

And so forth, in language which to-day applies with a frightful fitness to later policy in the same region. "We ought never to have gone to Zululand at all. We should have left the Zulus entirely to themselves. Our interference was the great primal blunder which produced all the evil." And there is a no less striking coincidence of application in the language of the then Radical on the aggression of the Tory Government in Afghanistan:—

"In his opinion, the attempt to force a mission on the Ameer was extremely

ill-judged, owing to the latter's well-known hostility to such a scheme..... The final pretext on which the war was grounded—the reception of a Russian mission at Cabul—proved nothing except that the Ameer was justly offended by the treatment he had experienced.²

To-day, the same party play the same infamous part in Thibet, and Mr. Chamberlain supports them.

Lastly, we find the Mr. Chamberlain of the Radical days denouncing "the noisy imperialism of the music halls."³ Many men have had to eat their words in the turning of the whirligig of politics; but not before in British public life has there been seen such a feat of deglutition as has been achieved by the author of that phrase.

CHAPTER VI.

OFFICE

MEN before and since 1880 have been raised to Cabinet office after even a shorter service in Parliament than four years; but the elevation of the Radical Mayor of Birmingham stood for more than mere promotion: it was Gladstone's concession—some said his capitulation—to the new Radicalism; and it was a testimony to the new Minister's power. He was made President of the Board of Trade.

It is certain that he regarded him-

self as destined to prosecute in office the policy he had pressed for outside. The Ministry was, as Mr. Morley remarks, "a coalition of that vexatious kind where those who happened not to agree sometimes seemed to be almost as well pleased with contention as with harmony.....It happened on more than one critical occasion that all the peers *plus* Lord Hartington were on one side, and all the commoners on the other..... Confronting Lord Hartington was

¹ Speech cited by Skottowe, pp. 34-35.

² *Ibid*, pp. 36-37.

³ Mee, p. 69.

Mr. Chamberlain, eager, intrepid, self-reliant, alert, daring, with notions about property, taxation, land, schools, popular rights, that he expressed with a plainness and pungency of speech that had never been heard from a privy councillor and Cabinet Minister before, that exasperated opponents, startled the Whigs, and brought him hosts of adherents among Radicals out of doors. It was at a very early stage in the existence of the Government that this important man said to an ally in the Cabinet: 'I don't see how we are to get on, if Mr. Gladstone goes.'"¹

In the acts of Ministerial indiscipline to which Mr. Morley goes on to allude, we may be sure that Chamberlain had his full share; and in the prolonged Cabinet dispute in 1883 on the removal of the Wellington statue from Hyde Park Corner it may be taken for granted that he was one of those who thrice outvoted the Premier. In his own office he was nothing if not Radical, and as time went on he gained rather in zeal than in discretion. Even his first measure, the Seamen's Wages Act, is admitted to have "proved anything but beneficial."² His Merchant Shipping Bill, framed to give effect to a sympathy of long standing with Mr. Plimsoll, set against him ship-owners of both parties, some of whom persistently challenged him to produce particular proof of his general allegation that

they sent to sea unseaworthy ships. In this controversy may be noted, perhaps for the first time, a premonitory want of practical preparedness in his polemic. His rapid success at Birmingham, as we saw, had given him a false measure of the difficulties of national legislation; and we shall see him in the near future transforming under stress of circumstance and character from a man of practical schemes and creative action to one of visionary plans and negative accomplishment. But in 1883 he was still ardently reformative. The Bill had to be withdrawn before the general opposition; and in 1885 he told¹ how he had offered to Gladstone to resign, by way of bringing the question before the constituencies. On Gladstone's urging, he added, "I consented to remain; but I did not abandon, and will never abandon, the purpose I have had in view." Like all his other reforming purposes, however, it was abandoned very soon. Some improvements were made in the position of seamen in 1888 and 1894; but Mr. Chamberlain's high-pitched crusade was never renewed.

His Patents Bill and his Bankruptcy Bill were in their degree fairly successful; but at the time, it is clear, they represented for him merely the small measures possible to him in a half-Whig Cabinet, not at all the kind of reforms he was eager to be at work upon. In 1883 and 1885 he made speeches proposing a whole series of great Radical

¹ *Life of Gladstone*, iii, 3.

² Mee, pp. 72-73.

¹ Speech in August: Marris, p. 191.

measures, in urging which he had no concurrence whatever from his colleagues, his ideas being, in fact, sharply distasteful to most of them, as well as to the Liberal "Right." What fluttered the Liberal doves most, perhaps, were the two famous indictments of the landowning class. The first was that of the Birmingham speech of March 30th, 1883, in which he wound up a long reply to Salisbury on the Irish question by calling him

the spokesman of a class—of the class to which he himself belongs—"who toil not, neither do they spin"—whose fortunes, as in his case, have originated in grants made long ago for such services as courtiers render kings—and have since grown and increased while their owners slept by the levy of an unearned share on all that other men have done by toil and labour to add to the general wealth and prosperity of the country of which they form part.¹

Another of Chamberlain's speeches of the period intimated that "the opinion of the streets has had a mighty force in our political history. It has shaken monarchs on their thrones." This and similar utterances led in 1884 to an exchange of amenities between him and Salisbury which well illustrates the character of both men. Speaking at Kelso on October 11th, 1884, Salisbury observed:—

I only hope that, if Mr. Chamberlain incites the people to riot, he will head the riot himself. I hope that, if he is going, according to his threat, to march on London from Birmingham, we may see him at the head of the advancing column. My impression is that those

who will have to receive him will be able to give a very good account of him, and that Mr. Chamberlain will return from his adventure with a broken head, if with nothing worse.

In similar taste the President of the Board of Trade replied:—

I am not afraid of my Lord Salisbury, and I will accept of his challenge on one condition—if my constituents should do again what they were prepared to do in 1832, and should march to London to lay their grievances at the foot of the Throne—the condition that Lord Salisbury himself will head the column which, he says, is to come to withstand me. In that case, if my head is broken, it will be broken in very good company.

Never within the century had two politicians of Cabinet rank so vulgarly bandied threats; and we may imagine how Gladstone regarded the exhibition. Were it not that her intervention would have involved censure of Salisbury no less than of Chamberlain, the Queen would probably have called the Premier's attention to this performance, as she had done to a Birmingham speech of Chamberlain's in June of 1883, which greatly disturbed Gladstone by its disregard of the normal restraints of Cabinet-Ministership, "most especially in relation to the Crown, to which the speech did not indicate the consciousness of his holding any special relation."¹ Private comment was again made from Windsor in January of 1885, when Chamberlain, speaking at Ipswich and Birmingham, set forth an "unauthorised programme" of his

¹ *Speeches*, p. 41.

¹ *Morley's Life of Gladstone*, iii, 112.

own, not for the last time. Gladstone had to reply in this case that the speech was "on various grounds open to grave objection," though he did not feel distinctly "entitled to interfere and lecture the speaker." A few days later, however, Chamberlain extended his programme of reforms at Birmingham; and this time Gladstone had to intimate to his subordinate that "there had better be some explanations" when they next met.¹

It was in the Birmingham speech of January 5th, 1885, that there occurred the famous passage:—

When our social arrangements first began to shape themselves, every man was born into the world with natural rights.....with a right to a part of the land of his birth. But all these rights have passed away.....Some of them have been sold; some of them have been given away by people who had no right to dispose of them.....some have been destroyed by fraud; and some have been acquired by violence. Private ownership has taken the place of these communal rights.....But then, I ask, what ransom will property pay for the security which it enjoys? What substitute will it find for the natural rights which have ceased to be recognised?²

This was not a random outbreak. In the speech at Ipswich, made within a few days of the other, he asked: "What insurance will wealth find to its advantage to provide against the risks to which it is undoubtedly subject?"³ The label of "Jack Cade" was not ill applied by the Tory leaders to one who thus

proposed not an orderly democratic reconstruction, but a kind of political blackmailing of the propertied classes. Yet it was with those leaders, and this unransomed and uninsured caste of property-holders, that Chamberlain was ere long to cast in his lot for life.

So high did the resentment of Chamberlain's Radicalism run among the Whig sections of the party that, according to a current statement, two of his brothers were on his account black-balled when proposed at the Reform Club in 1884; and the feeling would certainly not be softened in 1885. The more uncritical Radicals, on the other hand, could not but see in the author of such flaming speeches as those before cited the incarnation of anti-Toryism. Of all Liberals and Radicals, too, he was the most uncompromising defender of Free Trade. His friendly biographer, Miss Marris, carefully omits from her specimens of the "ransom" speech the following passage:—

The owners of property—those who are interested in the existing state of things, the men who have privileges to maintain—would be glad to entrap you from the right path by raising the cry of Fair Trade, under which they cover their demand for Protection, and in connection with which they would tax the food of the people in order to raise the rents of the landlord. Protection very likely might, it probably would, have this result—it would increase the incomes of the owners of great estates, and it would swell the profits of the capitalists who were fortunate enough to engage in the best-protected industries. But it would lessen the total production

¹ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, iii, 173-4.

² *Speeches*, 1885, p. 104.

³ Marris, p. 219.

of the country, it would diminish the rate of wages, and it would raise the prices of every necessary of life. Believe me, it is not in this direction that you have to look for remedy for the depression which undoubtedly prevails. Property cannot pay its debt to labour by taxing its means of subsistence. You must look for the cure in legislation laying the heaviest burdens on the shoulders best able to bear them—legislation which will, in some degree at any rate, replace the labourer on the soil and find employment for him without forcing him into competition with the artisans of the towns—legislation which will give a free education to every child in the land.¹

The same confident emphasis marks a speech on the same subject at Birmingham, November 12th, 1885, in which occurs also another touch of the incipient brutality which has latterly become characteristic:—

“Now, one question upon which I laid stress was the importation of sugar, and really the sugar question is about as strong as any we can have. I would as soon fight this Fair Trade humbug—(cheers)—upon sugar as upon any other thing. Well, I find that my remarks upon sugar created a stir. (Laughter.) We fluttered the doves, and in the Tory paper to-day I read that there was a meeting of the Workmen's National Association for the Abolition of the Foreign Sugar Bounties, at Whitechapel, and at this meeting they passed a number of resolutions, and they decided that they would send a deputation down to Birmingham. (Laughter.) They will be coming here directly—(loud laughter)—and this deputation is to come and convince my constituents in the Western Division of Birmingham that I am the enemy of the working classes. (Oh, oh.) Well, they have

got a nice job. (Laughter and cheers.) They ought to be well paid for it—(laughter)—and I have no doubt they will be. (Hear, hear.) I know something about the Workmen's National Association for the Abolition of the Sugar Bounties. (Laughter.) I have met the gentlemen before. (Renewed laughter.) It is a sham Association—(hear, hear)—with precious few workmen about it. It is got up and paid by a few West India planters who want to make a profit out of an increased price of sugar. Ah! I have great sympathy with any real movement on the part of the working classes, but I have no sympathy at all with those men who sell themselves to an agitation of this kind. (Loud cheers.) Well, I HAVE NO DOUBT MY CONSTITUENTS WILL KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM WHEN THEY COME. (Laughter and hear, hear.).....Well, now, here is a nut for them to crack. (Laughter.) The only argument they have got which is worth a moment's consideration is this: They say that cheap sugar has thrown out of employment a number of decent, industrious working men who were engaged in the refinery trade, and they ask you, the whole population of the country, to submit to an additional charge for your sugar in order that these poor fellows may be set to work again. Now, I made the statement the other night that there were more people employed in the sugar trade now than there ever were before. I made that statement from memory, but I have now got the returns. This is from the census returns. The number of people employed as sugar refiners in the census return of 1851—i.e., thirty years ago—were returned as 2,820; and at the last census of 1881 they were returned as 4,484. (Cheers.) Well, now, you see, gentlemen, it is not a very large number at the best; but, as a matter of fact, there are more working men employed in the trade now than there ever were, and the claim upon you to submit to a great sacrifice, to raise the price of every cup of tea you drink,

¹ Speech of January 5th, 1885, in *Speeches*, p. 105.

of almost every article of consumption—for sugar enters into almost the whole consumption of your household—this claim, made by these eighteen-penny working men—(laughter)—is not made on behalf of the working classes, but it is made in order that the few West India planters may double their fortunes rather quicker than they otherwise would do. (Cheers.) ✓

It is needless to offer further samples of his zealous opposition to what he then termed the "Fair Trade humbug." It has been given to no politician in modern times, if to any in any time, to present so universal a tergiversation, all accomplished from the fiftieth year onwards in a life given to politics from its prime. The constituents who twenty years ago got the hint to upset the meetings of the Protectionists are now ready to better the teaching by breaking up the meetings of those who go to Birmingham to defend Free Trade against "Our Joe," become the arch-Protectionist of his day. The opinions are reversed: the spirit of violence and bluster is the same.

Not the least Radical of Mr. Chamberlain's "lines," finally, was that he took in regard to Ireland. "Before the Cabinet was six months old," notes Mr. Morley, "the Duke [of Argyll] was plucking Mr. Gladstone's sleeve with some vivacity at the Birmingham language on Irish land."¹ Already in June of 1881, in the first of his reprinted speeches, defending the new Land Bill, he was insisting on the futility of coercion as a cure for the Irish trouble, and

expressing his pride in being "associated with the ablest and noblest of English statesmen" in the policy of conciliation. In the Swansea speech of February 1st, 1883, he had to avow that, "after eighty years of stormy union, Ireland is still hostile and unreconciled. Concession has been powerless to soften her animosity." Whereupon he proceeded to urge that, "as long as there is any just cause for discontent in Ireland, there is still scope for our remedies.....We cannot take our hands from the plough."

A few months later he declared that "the time is coming, and it will come shortly, when we shall once more have to turn our attention to this, the greatest of all the political problems of our time." He was thus specially associated in the public mind with the movement towards Home Rule; and it is inferrible that his advocacy of Irish reform did something to restrain that of Mr. Gladstone, who, however, had spoken on the subject definitely enough. As we have seen, he gave his chief no little trouble from time to time by his extremely independent way of forecasting future reform, combining the positions of "agitator" and subordinate Cabinet Minister in a fashion quite new in British experience, and always with the effect of alarming the propertied orders, Liberal and Conservative alike. At the end of 1885, probably most men of affairs would have predicted that his future would be that of a Radical or "demagogue," at irreconcilable feud with all Conservatism.

¹ *Life of Gladstone*, iii, 49.

In the autumn of the same year, out of office, Mr. Chamberlain was if possible more aggressive than before. The following utterance made its sensation at the time, and, we shall see, probably had a definitely chilling effect on Gladstone:—

But now that we have a Government of the people by the people, we will go on and make it the Government for the people, in which all shall co-operate in order to secure to every man his natural rights—his right to existence, and to a fair enjoyment of it. I shall be told to-morrow that this is Socialism. I have learnt not to be afraid of words that are flung in my face instead of argument. Of course, it is Socialism! The Poor Law is Socialism, the Education Act is Socialism, the greater part of municipal work is Socialism, and every kindly act of legislation by which the community has sought to discharge its responsibilities and its obligations to the poor is Socialism. But it is none the worse for that.¹

Towards the Tory leader he continued to hold his early tone of fierce hostility—a tone certainly well earned by Salisbury's own normal utterance, but never descended to by Gladstone. During the interval of Tory Government between the resignation of Gladstone in the summer of 1885 and the general election he thus speaks of the Premier:—

What has Lord Salisbury to offer us that should induce us to retain him in the position he now occupies under false pretences?.....While Lord Salisbury admits that it is desirable to multiply the number of owners of land, the only practical legislation which he is prepared to propose, according to his own account, will have exactly the

opposite effect. Ay, this is Toryism all over. It is cynical, it is obstructive, it is selfish, it is incapable.¹

It was of this leader of selfish and incapable Toryism that he was ere long to be the colleague.

It is not merely with Lord Salisbury, however, that we find him at daggers drawn in 1885. There is one episode of that period to which no allusion is made in Mr. Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, but which must have caused the leader some searchings of heart. During the autumn recess of 1884, the Tory leaders, inspired by Lord Randolph Churchill, planned a series of meetings throughout the country, the first being held in the grounds of Aston Park, Birmingham. On this occasion those tactics with which M. Ostrogorski charges the early Birmingham caucus were systematically employed. Following a common Tory practice, many Liberals got entrance to the meeting by forged tickets; others scaled the walls, in which finally a breach was made; and after much rioting the meeting was dispersed, three hundred chairs being broken up and used as weapons in a free fight.

When Parliament met, Churchill moved an amendment to the Address, charging on Chamberlain's Birmingham associates the planning of the outrage, and on Chamberlain a tacit acquiescence in it. Gangs of roughs, he asserted, had been deliberately hired: "the Cecil Street gang, to which £50 has been paid; the Harding Street gang; the Lench

¹ Warrington speech, September 8th, 1885.

¹ *Speeches*, 1885, p. 249.

Street gang; the Great Barr Street gang, under the brothers Reed, two notorious prize-fighters, each of whom received £20"; the arrangement with the leaders having been that if they managed to break into the grounds the gangs should receive 5s. per head, and 2s. 6d. more if they broke up the meeting.

Chamberlain's defence was to the effect that "the proceedings of his constituents were caused by almost intolerable provocation: they were pursued almost entirely in self-defence"; and to the charge of having done nothing to prevent the riot, he replied: "The noble lord says I might have stopped it. My answer is that I could not have stopped it if I would, and I would not have stopped it if I could. Why on earth should I have stopped it?" From this point, his defence went from bad to worse. To support the plea of "intolerable provocation" he produced a number of affidavits, of which three, signed by three men named Edward Reed, Charles Smith, and Larry Mack, charged a Mr. Jarvis with hiring roughs on the Tory account. While the House still sat, Mr. Jarvis sent a telegram pronouncing the charge a deliberate fabrication, and he at once took legal proceedings against the three men named. Only Reed could be found, and the case was heard against him on November 12th. The magistrate, after trying to get the case settled "to save the credit of the town," at length sent the case to a jury on December 6th, binding Mr. Jarvis to prosecute, but refusing to commit Reed.

In February, Larry Mack, alias Peter Joyce, was arrested, and committed for trial. On the following day Charles Smith, alias Cultry, alias Caughtry, was arrested. Having been remanded, Smith made a confession as to the fashion in which the affidavits had been suborned. "Four or five of us together arranged what we were to say at a meeting we had at the Leopard Inn, at Dale End. As soon as we had the stuff we started boozing, and it was a dear booze." This squared substantially with the evidence given by one witness at the hearing of the case against Reed:—

"Your first batch of four cost you £5?"—"That is so." "Had you to promise the £5 before either of the four would speak?"—"Yes." "After four men had gone away with £5 between them, plenty of witnesses came?"—"Oh, yes, we had a large number." "Will you pledge your oath to the name of a single man who was not paid, in fact, for his evidence?"—"No." "Now we see the whole genesis; you start the ball with £5 for four. That is the encouragement, then, I suppose?"—"Yes."

Larry Mack, in turn, was tried at the Birmingham Assizes by a Birmingham jury, before Mr. Justice Field, on February 28th and March 2nd, 1885. In view of what Chamberlain afterwards alleged, it is necessary to say that the trial turned on a well-defined issue, and that it seems to have been perfectly fair. The prisoner was defended by counsel. The judge insisted on keeping politics out of the question. Mr. Jarvis gave a categorical denial to the charge

of having hired roughs to attend the meeting, and the defence did not cross-examine him. Prisoner's counsel endeavoured to take the line that the only question at issue was one of identity, but the judge refused to accept this view. "I must say there is an issue whether it is a false libel, and I shall have to leave that issue to the jury. Therefore don't say there is no issue." Prisoner's counsel finally admitted this. "When I say there is no issue, all I mean is simply this, that I raise no controversy about it. I admit that it is false for the purpose of this inquiry, and admit that it is a libel for the purpose of the inquiry, and the only point I invite you to consider and about which there is any controversy in the case is—Did that man make the affidavit or not?"

The judge, in his summing up, insisted that Mr. Jarvis must be taken to be innocent of the charge, and after a few minutes' deliberation the jury found the prisoner guilty. Reed was afterwards arraigned. It was found that the Vexatious Indictments Act, under which Mr. Jarvis had been bound over to prosecute, did not apply, and, after some difficulty raised by the judge on the question of forfeiting the recognisance, the prosecution was allowed to withdraw, having secured its purpose.

As Chamberlain was thus convicted of having misled the House by false evidence, he was there invited to apologise, whereupon he

hardily reproved the challenging member for re-opening a settled controversy. On this, another member asked, as a point of order, "whether, a Minister of the Crown having in the face of the House deliberately stated certain facts to prove his case, or in aid of some other case, when those facts have been proved in a Court of Law to be utterly inconsistent with what really took place, it is not his duty, as a Minister of the Crown, to apologise to the House?" The Speaker ruled that there was no point of order. Questioned again on March 5th, Mr. Chamberlain had "nothing to add to the answer which he gave to a similar question on February 23rd." And there the matter ended.

Thus fortuitously was Chamberlain saved from the consequences of a line of action which, leaving him, as he boasted, safe in the allegiance of his constituents, recoiled on his party, to whose leader it must have been deeply distasteful. That Gladstone and his colleagues forgave him, cannot be imputed to them as a very grave laxity, seeing that the Birmingham Conservatives soon did the same; but Liberalism certainly suffered there and then for its association with him; and there were not wanting both Liberals and Radicals who, finding him proved guilty of tactics repulsive to the very spirit of reform, henceforth regarded him with an incurable distrust.

CHAPTER VII.

SECESSION

In 1885, then, we find Chamberlain the leading Radical of his day, popular as such, hateful to and hating the Tory party, a thorn in the flesh of staid Liberalism, and for the same reason an imperfectly welcome colleague to the leader whom he outdid all men in extolling. He was now forty-nine years of age, with twenty-seven years of experience of public life, always in the above character. And he was yet to begin to move in an opposite direction.

As we have seen, he was a "Home Ruler" long before Gladstone, having stood as such at the Sheffield election of 1874; and when he promoted the resignation of Forster in 1882 it was certainly in the hope of making some lasting arrangement with the imprisoned Parnell. Before the Cabinet received intimation of Parnell's altered frame of mind, Chamberlain "had told Mr. Gladstone that he thought the time opportune for something like a reconciliation with the Irish party."¹ Gladstone took his view to the extent of deciding on the release of all prisoners not charged with crime; and Forster, disagreeing, resigned.

At this point it is important to note that Chamberlain had already vacillated somewhat in his view of

Home Rule. In 1874 he was very definitely a supporter of Mr. Isaac Butt, whose Home Rule scheme was laid out on federal lines. In 1884, however, he had written: "I object to the Home Rule proposed by the late Mr. Butt, because I believe it would not work, and would lead to a demand for entire separation."¹ Evidently this change of front was made on an inference from the language of Parnell and his comrades; yet we shall soon see him reverting to the federalist position on the ground that Mr. Gladstone's non-federal scheme would lead to a demand for separation. Presumably his attitude in 1884 was in agreement with that then held by Gladstone.

After this date, however, occurred the friction set up by Chamberlain's violent speeches on social reform, which caused Gladstone to regard him with a measure of distrust; and their later relations are somewhat obscure. On May 6th, 1885, Gladstone wrote to Granville, among other things, that he was not "under any obligation to follow or act with Chamberlain"; but when, later in the month, he wrote to the Queen concerning the opinions in the Cabinet as to Irish policy, he specified one scheme of representative

¹ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, iii, 64.

¹ Mee, pp. 103-104.

county boards, with a central executive board to be chosen by these, with special representation for property; and he spoke of the scheme as having been "first made known to Mr. Gladstone by Mr. Chamberlain."¹

This scheme was rejected by the majority of Ministers, including Lord Hartington and all the peers save Granville; but Gladstone spoke of it, in a letter to the Viceroy, as destined to rise again. When, however, after agreeing to drop a scheme of land purchase to which Chamberlain and Dilke were opposed, he agreed on Lord Spencer's pressure to resume it, the two Radical Ministers "would not assent to land purchase unless definitely coupled with assurances as to local government," and forthwith resigned. Gladstone being not unfavourable to their view, the resignations were suspended; but at this stage we find Chamberlain predicting to his chief that the "serious differences of principle" in the Cabinet would lead to a split in the next session.² So far, it would seem as if Gladstone were in sympathy with his Radical Ministers; and he so expresses himself to Lord Hartington at the end of the month.³ In a few days (June 6th) came the defeat of the Government by a combination of Tories and Parnellites. When that took place, the chances ostensibly were that Gladstone would in future be allied with Chamberlain against Hartington

on a policy of local self-government for Ireland.

At this point, however, there is furnished to us a vivid and memorable account of the personal relations of the two men, as determined in the autumn of 1885, when they were out of office. It comes from Mr. G. W. E. Russell, who may perhaps claim to have known Gladstone at the period in question as well as any other of his biographers. He records that he visited Gladstone on October 2nd, 1885, and had a private interview. It was at this period, as we have seen, that Chamberlain was proclaiming the identity of his aspirations with those of Socialism; and one of the most emphatic convictions of Gladstone at the same period, Mr. Russell informs us, was that Socialism under all aspects was detestable. The situation, as described by Mr. Russell, was thus piquant:—

I then learned, to my amazement, that he considered Lord Granville the most authoritative and influential person in the Liberal party, and the one whose glorious duty it would be, as soon as the general election was over, to call the Liberal leaders together for a consultation on results and prospects. Of Mr. Chamberlain's popularity, capacity, and ascendancy over the Radical part of the party he seemed to have no conception. I confessed myself an adherent of the "unauthorised programme," and Mr. Gladstone evidently believed me to be—what I was not—in Mr. Chamberlain's confidence. "What does Chamberlain mean?" he asked. I replied, so far as I knew, Chamberlain did not mean to dethrone my host from the Liberal leadership, and probably felt that he could not do so if he wished; but that

¹ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, iii, 193.

² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

I thought he most certainly meant to prevent Lord Hartington from succeeding to the leadership when Mr. Gladstone should surrender it. "But," I added, "surely the best way would be for you to ask Chamberlain to come here, and talk it out with him." My host could not have looked more amazed if I had suggested inviting the Pope or the Sultan; but my persuasions prevailed over his reluctance to mix political with private life, and the invitation was duly despatched and accepted. The visit proved infructuous. Socially all was pleasant; but to the merits of the "unauthorised programme" Mr. Gladstone remained impervious; and Mr. Chamberlain justly felt that if, just on the eve of the election, he abated the policy which had carried him to the first place in the affections of the Radicals, "the stones would immediately cry out." It has always been my opinion that, after this acute disagreement, Mr. Chamberlain could never again have harmoniously worked with his former chief, and that Home Rule was only the signal and the occasion for a severance which was inevitable.¹

The inference is hardly so convincing as it seems to Mr. Russell; but it must be allowed to have weight, especially as regards the attitude of Gladstone. It is not, indeed, very clearly borne out by Gladstone's own letters, written at the time to Lord Granville, on the subject of his conversations with Chamberlain. "He is a good man to talk to," writes Gladstone on the second day of his lieutenant's visit, "not only from his force and clearness, but because he speaks with reflection, does not misapprehend or (I think) suspect or make unneces-

sary difficulties.....As regards readjustment of taxation, he is contented with the terms of my address, and indisposed to make any new terms. As regards free education, he does not ask that this principle be adopted as part of the creed of a new Cabinet.The question of the House of Lords and disestablishment he regards as still lying in the remoter distance. All these subjects I separated entirely from the question of Ireland, on which I may add that he and I are pretty well agreed; unless upon a secondary point—namely, whether Parnell would be satisfied to acquiesce in a County Government Bill."¹

This obscure passage has been ostensibly cleared up by Mr. Chamberlain in a comment made to Mr. Morley, to the effect that the proposal for a Local Government Bill was his. Gladstone, it would appear, doubted whether Parnell, after his recent strong affirmations as to his plans, would accept such a solution. But it is further on record that, just a month before, Chamberlain had declared concerning those announcements: "If these are the terms on which Mr. Parnell's support is to be obtained, I will not enter into the compact."² For the rest, Gladstone informed Granville that "all through, Chamberlain spoke of reducing to an absolute minimum his idea of necessary conditions."

Now, there is no sign here of any "acute disagreement," or even of

¹ G. W. E. Russell, article on "Mr. Morley's Gladstone," in *Independent Review*, November, 1903, pp. 340-1.

¹ *Life*, iii, 224-5.

² Speech at Warrington, September 8th, 1885.

any clash of opinion, as to Cabinet policy. Still, Chamberlain may have gone into the subject of his personal ideals after the strictly official part of the discussion was over; and while we have here the admission of his moderateness as a prospective colleague in the Cabinet, it is difficult to suppose that he made absolutely no account of the ideals he had just been publicly proclaiming.

There remains the alternative hypothesis that the initial rift within the lute was the difference of opinion as to what Parnell would accept; and here Gladstone might fairly be perplexed if Chamberlain, after his recent repudiation of the Parnell demands, counted on satisfying the Irish leader with a mere Local Government Bill. In any case, some sort of sunderance soon afterwards began to take place.

What seems to have happened between October, 1885, and Gladstone's return to power in the new Parliament in January, 1886, is a transfer of the leader's practical co-operation to some other adviser; and it may be that this is after all the secret of the severance which followed. It must have some significance that in 1886 Gladstone offered him only the Presidency of the Local Government Board, the least important of all the offices represented in the Cabinet; and Chamberlain must have recognised the nature of the case. The fact stands that early in 1886 Chamberlain was acting with Hartington in opposition to his late chief, though Chamberlain's reason was precisely the one with which

Hartington could least sympathise, and Hartington's was one with which Chamberlain could not conceivably sympathise at all, being, in fact, a hostility to any measure of local self-government for Ireland.

Still, it cannot be said that on the face of the history Chamberlain's action at this stage was other than straightforward. When Gladstone offered him in January of 1886 the post of President of the Local Government Board, he at once accepted, merely making certain conditions as to Irish policy. Whether or not he was already soured, as many think, by the inferior status of the post offered him after five years of Cabinet service, his severance began explicitly on the grounds of Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule and Land Bills.

Those who can read with a quite judicial detachment the speeches of Chamberlain on Home Rule in the House and elsewhere in the early part of 1886 will probably agree to say that, whether he was right or wrong, he bore himself laudably, not yielding in dignity or amenity to the best of his opponents. As against the methods of the Irish Nationalists on the other side, an impartial Home Ruler (such as the present writer) must admit that the honours of that stage of the encounter are with the dissident whom they dubbed "Judas." No sense of his subsequent divagations should check this acknowledgment, for no harm can be done to any good cause by coming to a true understanding of the mental processes of its enemies;

and it is only by discriminating the steps in Chamberlain's march that he can be fully understood. In the year 1889 he is demonstrably a different man from the Chamberlain even of 1887.

According to one account, current among good Liberals still, Chamberlain's secession was a quite unprincipled plan to upset Gladstone, apart from any conviction as to the rightness of his measures. There is even a dramatic narrative of how he prematurely exulted to a supposed accomplice over having "got the Old Man down." Should that narrative be ever personally vouched for, it will have to be reckoned with; but, while it is merely a tale that is told, we are bound to give more weight to considerations which tell another way. The present writer has heard an eminent publicist, now a determined opponent of Chamberlain on every line of his policy, and then, as now, a thorough Gladstonian, avow that from personal intercourse in 1886 he was perfectly satisfied of the sincerity of the seceder in his hostility to Gladstone's Bill. But all the open history, as we have seen, points to the same conclusion. It was to be expected that Gladstone's Bill would repel him. For one thing, it was a clear departure from Gladstone's own position as laid down by him in his second Midlothian speech¹:—

I desire, I may almost say I intensely desire, to see Parliament relieved of some portion of its duties.....The Par-

liament is overweighted. The Parliament is almost overwhelmed. If we can take off its shoulders that superfluous weight, by the constitution of secondary and subordinate authorities, I am not going to be frightened out of a wise measure of that kind by being told that in that I am condescending to the prejudices of Home Rulers. I will condescend to no such prejudices. I will consent to give to Ireland no principle, nothing that is not upon equal terms offered to Scotland and to the different parts of the United Kingdom.

And again, in a letter to Lord Granville in 1881:—

Home Rule has for one of its aims local government—an excellent thing, to which I would affix no limits except the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, and the right of all parts of the country to claim whatever might be accorded to Ireland. This is only a repetition of what I have often said before, and I have nothing to add or enlarge.¹

It is true that in 1885 Chamberlain had proposed in the Cabinet, and Gladstone had supported, as we have seen, a scheme of representative county government for Ireland, with a central board for all Ireland, to be chosen by the county boards;² and that this scheme—accepted at the time by Mr. Parnell—was abandoned only because Lord Hartington and all the peers in the Cabinet save Lord Granville were against it. But though Chamberlain had thus striven for a settlement which gave to Ireland exceptional treatment, it was of the nature of such a devolution of the powers of

¹ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, iii, 58.

² *Ibid*, iii, 193-4. Compare Chamberlain's *Home Rule Speeches*, pp. 34-35.

¹ November 23th, 1879.

V the Imperial Parliament as had been sketched in Gladstone's utterances of 1879 and 1881; and in the way of a special treatment for Ireland, Chamberlain had refused to go the length of a national legislature sitting at Dublin. In his Warrington speech of September 8th, 1885, he pointed out that Mr. Parnell's claims for an Irish Parliament exceeded the powers given to State legislatures in the American Union, "which had hitherto been the type and model of the Irish demands"; and as having in the past declared for that model, he opposed the extension of the Home Rule theory. In the same speech, too, he avowed that he would concede to all parts of the kingdom alike the fullest possible measure of local self-government.¹

Chamberlain held to this position when, early in 1886, he stated to Gladstone the conditions on which he re-accepted office.² The words above cited from Gladstone might consistently be stretched to mean a federal constitution for the three kingdoms: they cannot consistently cover the enactment of a single separate legislature for Ireland, virtually cut off from the rest of the constitution. That was apparently a special compromise, designed to disarm the hostility of the Irish party, who had been insisting on virtual independence. To meet the old problem, the Bill of 1886 proposed a new and anomalous solution, the acceptance

of which, by the Nationalists, was intelligible only on the view that they counted on its impermanence, unless indeed they had been suddenly brought to a state of judgment very novel for them. And unless Chamberlain were to pass through an equally quick transformation, it was natural that he should distrust and resist the invidious arrangement by which Irish members were to be excluded from Westminster.

Still more natural was it, if possible, that he should object to the vast payment proposed to be made to the Irish landlords. He and Sir Charles Dilke, as we saw, had actually tendered their resignations in May, 1885, when, after the collapse of the scheme of county government, a draft of a Land Purchase Bill was introduced in the Cabinet. It is true that he has since acquiesced in just such a measure; but that, as Mr. Kipling says, is another story, belonging to the period of apostasy. In January of 1885 he had delivered the "ransom" speech; and it would have been for him a much more obvious insincerity to assent to an immense endowment of the Irish landed interest at British risk than to accept a Home Rule Bill which gave a kind of Home Rule that he had never advocated.

The amenity of his earlier speeches in 1886, too, consists perfectly with the favourable view. Within recent years we have learned with great fulness how he can bear himself under the inspiration of malice, and in the character of a mere renegade.

¹ *Home Rule Speeches*, pp. 33-34.

² Letter of January 30th, 1886, given in volume of *Home Rule Speeches*, p. 39.

All the signals of regret for sunderance from old allies which an honest man would be concerned to show, and which are so invariably absent from his embittered latter-day speeches, are apparent in those of his first year of secession; and of the prize-ring truculence of his recent oratory there is there no trace. If he were then similarly inspired, it is strange that the symptoms should have been so different. In the summer of 1886 the combatant who now so spontaneously forestalls all invective was self-controlled under much provocation: against a tactic of aspersion and innuendo he was calm and statesmanlike. Had his motive been sheer self-seeking, and his purpose mere treachery, he would have had double reason for rage at seeing his plans miscarry. But no such rage is at that date visible.

There is reason, then, to infer that the first step in the severance of Chamberlain from the Liberal party was made on his side in good faith; and from this judgment it will follow that some little responsibility for his subsequent indefensible course may in all seriousness be said to rest with those Liberals who treated him as if it were not.

I say nothing here of the ultimate judgment of political history on the original decision of Gladstone in 1885-6 to reject the federal solution of the Home Rule problem: whatever that judgment may be, it is clearly out of the question to pass blame on him for intellectual error when we are merely showing

cause for reckoning Chamberlain's later depravation as partly traceable to the tactics of some of his opponents. The difficulty is to be sure of the line of causation. On the main issue, the utterances on both sides are perplexing. "I should look for the solution," said Chamberlain in his speech on the first reading, "in the direction of the principle of federation"; and he had just before avowed that he for one was "not likely to put forward again" the scheme of national (*i.e.*, provincial) councils. The remark as to federation, says Mr. Morley, "astounded allies and opponents alike.....Everybody could see that federation was a vastly more revolutionary operation than the delegation of certain legislative powers to a local Parliament."¹ But Gladstone's own professed principles had implied in advance something very like federation; and, as the event has shown, it could not have been harder to create an Irish Parliament on a federal footing than it has been found to create an isolated one. Furthermore, Gladstone, in his pamphlet on *The Irish Question*, published immediately after his defeat at the polls in 1886, expressly contemplates a federal solution after all:—

Of two things I feel assured. First, whatever practical claims either of these countries [Scotland and Wales] may make on their own behalf will be entertained and disposed of without stirring up the cruel animosities, the unworthy appeals to selfishness, the

¹ *Life of Gladstone*, iii, 316-317.

systematic misrepresentations which have told so fearfully against Ireland. And, secondly, that the desire for Federation floating in the minds of many has had an unexpected ally in the Irish policy of 1886; and that, if the thing which that term implies contains within itself possibilities of practical good, the chance of bringing such possibilities to bear fruit has thus been unexpectedly and largely improved.

It is not the least strange aspect of the great Liberal schism that, when the old leader and the seceding lieutenant were thus ostensibly at one on the wisdom and practicability of a federal constitution for the three kingdoms, no such policy was further pursued on either side. On this anomaly, we may surmise, the future political historian will have a good deal to say: for the present we can but judge that the degree of merely intellectual perversity on the two sides at the outset was on the face of the matter equal, and that the leader is not to be saddled with the responsibility of his colleague's reprobation. Professing to have a sound solution for the Irish problem, Chamberlain did nothing more to advance it, devoting his whole energies to thwarting the solution attempted by his former colleagues. For such a turning of the back on avowed duty there can be no excusal: to plead provocation in such a case is like pleading ill-temper on a charge of violence. If Gladstone is ever to be censured for a mere mistake of policy which chanced to drive Chamberlain out of Liberalism, Chamberlain must be doomed incomparably more deeply for a course

which is finally far worse than a mistake. Not by inculcating Gladstone is he to be even explained, much less excused. At most we may say that Chamberlain's downward course was perhaps hastened by the action of some on the Liberal side.

What I have in view is the obloquy cast on Chamberlain in 1886 by the majority of Irish Nationalists and British Home Rulers alike; the treating of dissent as treachery; the flinging of evil epithets at one who temperately argued. I know not whether it has been the fate of any of those who then shouted "traitor" to have the same base missile thrown at themselves in recent years; but some of us who, on the Liberal side, protested in 1886 against a theory of loyalty which turned conscience out of doors are fain to confess that in such a turning of the tables there would be a certain squalid justice.

However that may be, those old cries of "traitor" and "Judas" have to be kept in mind when we follow the line of Chamberlain's exodus. It is urged by fair-minded judges that the crucial test of his honesty is his conduct at and after the "Round-table Conference" of the winter of 1886-7. Mr. Morley, than whom no one is better fitted or entitled to write the history of that episode, leaves it something of a mystery. Twice did a group of Chamberlain's former colleagues meet him in conference, the second meeting taking place at the table of Sir George Trevelyan, who was now

satisfied to return to his party. Thus far it is at least clear that his former fellow-ministers held him for honest: had *they* believed him to be a mere plotter of treasons and stratagems, they would hardly have so conferred with him. The first meeting promised well; the second seemed to ensure a settlement; and in his speech of January 22nd, 1887, at Hawick, Chamberlain appeared to count hopefully on an agreement in a federal solution, with the Canadian constitution for model. But in his speech of the 29th at Birmingham there was much asperity as against Irish Nationalists who claimed to dictate the settlement in every detail, also as against Irish outrages, and concerning the stoppage of all British reforms by Irish troubles; and on February 5th appeared his article, in the *Baptist* newspaper, of all places, sounding an angry alarm to the Nonconformists and Radicals in general, to the effect that disestablishment and all other reforms were being indefinitely postponed in deference to Irish malcontents. The negotiation was necessarily suspended; and as Chamberlain soon after disavowed all wish to return to the Conference, it was never resumed.

In a speech delivered in May of 1889,¹ Chamberlain, contradicting a statement by Sir William Harcourt, said: "What we discussed at the Round-table Conference was a scheme based upon provincial lines, based upon the lines of the provincial

Government of Canada, and not Mr. Gladstone's scheme. It had no resemblance whatever to it." A scheme on the model of the provincial Government of Canada *would* have been a federal one; and though Gladstone did not later urge such a scheme, one is inclined to surmise that Chamberlain's sudden withdrawal from negotiation may have been partly brought about by his finding that *his* fellow-seceders would not stand by him in such a policy. Still, the rupture has an air of caprice or passion, since such a cause, which might have been foreseen, would surely have been divined and disclosed. As the records stand, neither side refused the other's scheme.

The chances are that some specific friction caused the rupture. There is a circumstantial story of how in May, 1886, Mr. Labouchere arranged between Gladstone and Chamberlain a compromise under which the Irish members were to be retained at Westminster; how Chamberlain issued a circular-telegram, stating that the Premier had "absolutely surrendered"; and how Mr. Parnell, procuring a copy, showed it to Mr. Gladstone, who then balked.¹ Such incidents are conceivable; and some equally unworthy cause may have determined Chamberlain's final severance from Liberalism. In that case, his reputation can gain nothing from a disclosure of the facts; it is bad enough that we should have to

¹ *Speeches on the Irish Question*, 1890, p. 191.

¹ Mee, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 1901, pp. 112-116.

ascribe his decision to resentment of the common hostility of Liberals and Home Rulers. To ascribe it to some passing pique or cloud of misunderstanding would be to conclude that over a great national emergency he acted in the manner of an irritable tradesman, unfitted to handle public issues.

Until, then, a more intimate and particular explanation of the final breach of 1887 is forthcoming, we may reasonably look for the solution in the open facts of the whole situation. It matters not whether we see the main factor in the fundamental character of Chamberlain or in the Liberal abuse of him; the fact remains that, given his character, hatred enough had been generated to make a real reunion impossible. For of all hatreds those between former coadjutors who are not personally friends are the worst; and on the part of many Liberals as well as of all Parnellites there had arisen a positive hatred for the seceder. His colleagues were not so embroiled, which is thus far all in his favour; but if he were at that stage to return to the party he must stand in his old relation of authority to the rank and file; and most of these, outside Birmingham, would have none of his counsel. The ascent to prime leadership in the party which had formerly lain open before him was now virtually barred for an indefinite time: his position in the council of war would be invidious, his presence looked at askance, his co-operation discounted. In politics, not leaders, but followers, are the true partisans,

the typical sectaries, the inveterate fanatics; and the partisans of Gladstone had not the ripened adaptiveness of their chief. Much vilification of the "traitor" had made them heartily believe him one; and it is probable that while the captains were engineering a treaty some of the zealots were privately making it understood that there would be no obedient rehabilitation for him if they could have their way. In particular, the Parnellites may have done their part to warn off one whom they above all had denounced, and professed most to distrust. The rupture of the Round-table negotiations, in fact, seems finally intelligible in the light of the known situation, whatever may have been the precise private occasion of it.

Still, the factor of private occasion is not to be excluded; and when we study Chamberlain as a personality, in the light of his antecedents and his later developments, we cannot quite quash the common opinion that his withdrawal was at bottom motivated by his resentment of the low official status latterly offered him by Gladstone. The current Liberal view was, and is, that if he had been offered a post more commensurate with his ambitions he would have got over his objections to the Home Rule Bill. If the foregoing analysis be sound, this view is mistaken. But Mr. Chamberlain has to thank his own later revelation of his character for the facility with which it can be accepted.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEMORALISATION

THE most favourable explanation, then, of Chamberlain's final breach with his old party is one that turns upon his own lack of the higher qualities of a statesman. Call the missing trait either magnanimity or sagacity, it matters little: he had been turned by the reaction of other men's passions and his own into a path where he could henceforth achieve the best neither for himself nor for his country. When we are considering such a case without the heat of conflict on us, it cannot but wear an aspect of pathos, of the tragic; so clearly does it comment the sombre adages: "'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus"; "Men's judgments are parcels of their fortunes."

Chamberlain's moral inadequacy connects with intellectual limitation. In a statesman's career much depends on his outfit for private life: he will be dignified and scrupulous as to his plans in the measure of his inward resources, his gift of facing defeat and retirement. Statesmen such as Gladstone and Mr. Morley, lovers of books as well as of power, students as well as schemers, can turn away from public life with a certain secret elation, a compensating contentment in the return to the desk, the library, and the inner world of mind. Indeed, we have reason to

measure a man's fitness for both the inner and the outer arena by his visible possession of the key to both; and when, as in recent years, we see a statesman, presumptively qualified by a habit of philosophy for resistance to the lower temptations of public life, nevertheless yield to them as might one who had no joys out of office, we are moved to question no less his philosophic gift than his statesmanship.

However that special case may be decided, it has long been clear that Chamberlain could not live out of the world of affairs, could not face isolation, could not make for himself a refuge of thought and contemplation. He had, in fact, no philosophy of life; he had only instincts, appetites, ambitions, prejudices, hatreds, energies, the stock-in-trade of an average public man, in a much fuller than average measure; and public life, action, power, were to him as the breath of his nostrils. After his years of pride of place, the prospect of exclusion from office for many years seems to have progressively maddened him. His little appetite for study had been easily glutted, and his conservatory was his one private occupation: he must be a politician or nothing. And in politics he was being hemmed in. Either he must humble himself to

the Liberals and Irish Nationalists, whom he had hoped to dominate, or he must find alike compensation and revenge in thwarting them; and though he had once brought himself to an act of self-prostration in a published apology for improper expressions in a speech,¹ his was not the nature to accept humiliation on an extended scale. For such a personality a large patience was impossible; and all his faculty for feud, hitherto seen in his many resentful allusions to hereditary Nonconformist wrongs and aristocratic arrogance, wrought to poison his temper against the forces that were upsetting his career.

The process of demoralisation was rapid. In April of 1886, addressing his constituents at Birmingham, he had made the declaration: "I am not going to enter any cave; I am not going to join any coalition—(cheers)—of discordant elements and parties."² Within a year he had done all this. No more unnatural coalition was ever made than that between the speaker of the "ransom" speech and the Government headed by Lord Salisbury. The two men had opposed and aspersed each other more bitterly than any two other leaders of modern times. The partnership of Salisbury and Disraeli, though the former notoriously hated the latter, had been plausible in comparison; Gladstone had never assailed either of them as Chamberlain had assailed both; and in 1886

Chamberlain had repeatedly spoken of Gladstone in terms of the highest admiration; winding up, for instance, the speech above quoted with a peroration beginning: "For my part, I prefer to seek example and precedent in the life of the great leader to whom, for the first time, I am now opposed"; and ending: "I am well assured he would be of all men the last to condemn in others the consistency which on similar occasions he had himself so honourably maintained." There must have been a strange disintegration of mind, a profound vitiation of character, in the personality which could within a year of such an utterance begin a new career of the most shameless inconsistency, speedily involving a complete alliance with the caste he had so long denounced; a partnership with the men he had for twenty years impugned as the worst enemies of national well-being; a callous adoption of causes he had always detested; and a renunciation of well-nigh every plan of reform he had ever entertained.

There is a tendency in political life to accept such apostasies with a cynical compliance. That is indeed the one plea to be urged at this stage in mitigation of judgment on Chamberlain. If, however, we are to note all the facts, we are bound to say that the act under notice did more to lower the standards of political life in Britain than any other in our generation. Sincerity became a chimera for both parties to the new compact. Unionists, so-called, might affect to believe that

¹ Letter in *Times*, June 19th, 1876.

² *Home Rule Speeches*, p. 95.

they were united to "save the union," though it became instantly apparent that most of those who left the Liberal party on that plea had in them no more of the spirit of "union" than their Tory colleagues, who had never disguised that their inspiration was much more hatred of the Irish than love for anything else. But when on every question of public policy the seceders were found taking high Tory views; when Chamberlain in particular rapidly developed into a perfectly complaisant colleague for Salisbury, and his Birmingham following grew as zealous for the Tory cause as they had ever been for the Radical; common sense, in any who continued to be ruled by it, could but pronounce that by such a collapse of so many pretensions manhood was shamed and honour prostituted.

Common sense, in fact, had ceased to guide either party to the new alliance. It was a covenant of personal malice, the ignoblest pact that men can frame. The essential inspiration of "Unionism," so-called, for many years, was mere hatred of Gladstone; and whether or not Chamberlain became on this as on other sides fully tempered to the atmosphere in which he had chosen to live, his life's work henceforth was to forward Toryism to the mere end of frustrating Liberalism. The low mood in which he had helped to plan or to homologate the Aston riots had become the standing spirit of his life. And, after all, it goes with general experience of con-

duct that, when men are once capable of taking satisfaction in vulgar personal revenges, they are able with little strain to change their allies. Where it is personal prestige and not principle that makes the motive-force; where there is no high aspiration to be wounded by the consciousness of trying unworthy expedients, there is small security for loyalty to anything save apparent self-interest, as seen through temper. And the admission of temper to the seat of rule in any great issue is the beginning of the end of judgment.

The worsening of Chamberlain's temper and tactic was rapid. Down to the end of 1886 he had spoken like a patriot, concerned to heal civil dissension though averse to the courses of his colleagues. From the rupture of the Round-table Conference, save for one or two conventional professions of goodwill, he became a mere vessel of wrath. If he ever hinted at a reform, it was by way of teaching his auditors to regard the Irish people as enemies whose pretensions hindered all measures relating to England and Scotland. Hardly even Lord Salisbury, the most acrid and negative of Conservative leaders, the most incapable of constructive thought or chivalrous sympathy, outwent his new henchman in sustained bitterness of tongue and spirit. Indeed, Salisbury's spleen was so customary, so constitutional, as to be commonly discounted by friends and foes; but Chamberlain's (malice) was a new growth, inasmuch as he showed a worse animus towards his former

party than he had shown even to his former foes. His very bitterness told of a mind ill at ease with itself; he seemed to clench his teeth when he thought of his past and its frustration; and where a really ill-used man of any merit would have felt sadness, he showed the anger of those who have been in the wrong. To read his speeches after 1886 is to follow the course of a mind poisoned.

As early as April of 1887 he showed the working of the venom. In the course of a speech at Ayr, when he was describing the murder of a man named Byars by Irish moonlighters a few months before, a voice called out, "Watch yourself." It was at once assumed that this was a threat instead of, what it very well might have been, a friendly or fatuous warning from a fellow-Unionist, to the effect that Nationalists would stick at nothing. The moment the tumult was quelled, Chamberlain proceeded: "Gentlemen, now you have before you an instance of the demoralisation of politics—(loud cheers)—which has been produced by the action of the leaders of the Liberal party."¹

Addressed by the tactician of the Aston riots to Gladstone and Mr. Morley and Lord Spencer, the imputation attains the moral picturesque. When he was not in this vein of irrational virulence, he was in one of insolence hardly more conducive to reunion. "I do not.....abandon," he declared at Edinburgh two

months later, "the hope that the bulk of the Gladstonian Liberals will before long return to the fold."¹ In the same month he declared that the cleavage was "irreparable"²—a plain outbreak of malevolence, which suggests once more that at previous stages, despite his ostensible moderation of tone, he was moved by personal grudges. If at the beginning of the month he had any statesmanlike ground for counting on reunion, there can have been no statesmanlike ground for the change. It was the decision of a man demoralised by personal hate.

For nearly twenty years of public life Chamberlain had acted, on the whole, on the best political motives of which he was capable. Never a thinker, he was made a democrat by his combination of a certain measure of rational public spirit and concern for social justice with his hot prejudices of class, sect, and heredity. At best the mixture was not admirable; and the result was not morally inspiring in any high degree: witness the Aston Riots. But for such a nature the temper of the reformer, spurred by his resentments, was the best attainable; and it was at least better than that of the contrary passion of Conservatism. It set him on the side of the oppressed, the poor, the ill-governed, with his face towards a better future for all. Up to 1886 he knew that England had shamefully misgoverned Ireland: he had realised to the full the moral

¹ *Speeches on the Irish Question*, 1890, p. 14.

¹ *Speeches on the Irish Question*, 1890, p. 41.

² Mee, p. 120.

and political imbecility of meeting Irish complaints with a mere indictment of the character of the Irish people. After 1887 he made that indictment for years his political stock-in-trade.

Henceforth his back was turned on all good ideals. To the normal malice of Conservatism he brought the abnormal malice of the renegade; and in so far as Conservatism adopted him it became visibly worse, substituting for the older temper of honest repugnance to change a new chicane of official strategy, directed by no higher aim than the frustration of the aims of the other side. In that process the new Conservatism got rid even of some of its prejudices, as corrupted men are wont to do; and it is claimed for Chamberlain that he thus "educated" it as Disraeli had done before him. Disraeli, it is true, with his conscienceless lucidity, had begun the

corruption; but he did not consume it. It was left to Chamberlain to infect Conservatism with his own ultimate baseness, making its ruling spirit neither a concern for permanence nor a concern for adaptation, but a vicious zest for cunning compromises, including the systematic bribery in turn of all vested interests, to the worthy end of defeating the plans and aspirations of the opposing party.

When Coriolanus went over to the Volscians, the compact between their hates and his was speedily solved by their primitive sincerity in the tragic way that in a barbarous age was morally best for all. Modern British Conservatism and Chamberlain, in their similar coalition, have on their more civilised plane been less fortunate. The commercial Coriolanus, in fact, was made of meaner stuff to start with.

CHAPTER IX.

DEPRAVATION

It remains to trace briefly the actions of what may be termed Mr. Chamberlain's middle and closing periods—if we are to mark definite stages in a downward career which has been a steady progress in political depravation. For convenience, we may reckon a middle period as running from 1886 to

1895, when he took office in the "Coalition" Ministry; whereafter his worsenment is swift indeed.

The steps from the point of exasperation against his old colleagues to the latest phase of utter reaction are instructive. After deciding that he hated Home Rulers more than he had ever done Conservatives, he

found himself able to accept, in 1887, "at twenty-four hours' notice," the position of plenipotentiary for the Salisbury Government in the negotiations at Washington on the Canadian Fisheries Question. Here he began to reap some of the fruits of his vituperation of the Irish people, which had been going on up to the moment of his departure. Part of the Nemesis of English misrule in Ireland is the fixed animosity of the ten millions of the Irish race in the United States; and the first news of his acceptance of the Commissionership called forth from them a shout of protest. Chamberlain promptly replied by new invective; and from the American Press came the warning that, while professing to seek an amicable arrangement of the fishery dispute, he was putting it in peril by his constantly provocative speeches. Even Canadian journals declared that no treaty could be carried unless Mr. Chamberlain were dropped.¹ Still he had the courage to sail.

In the States and Canada he had the sense to abstain from direct provocation of Irishmen; but he could not avoid indirect. In a speech at Toronto, at the end of December, he took the line of suggesting that "it may be well that the Confederation of Canada may be the lamp to light our pathway to the Confederation of the British Empire. That idea may only exist at present in the imagination of the

enthusiast; but it is a grand idea."² But, of course, there was no hint that federation should begin where it was most needed—at home. The peroration of the Toronto speech was an appeal to promote "the closer relations, the kindly feeling, the goodwill, which ought always to exist between the sons of *England* throughout the world and the old folks at home." Reconciliation, that is to say, was to be sought between those who had not quarrelled, while the menacing breach between England and Ireland, the lesion in the very heart of the "empire," was to be tacitly treated as a permanency when it was not being deepened by fresh curses.

In the same spirit, the plenipotentiary's speech at Philadelphia to the "Order of the Sons of St. George," in February of 1888, perorates on "the traditions of the proud-spirited *dominant race* to which you belong."² Ever since, "the dominant race" has been a by-word among Irish Americans. The end of the matter was that the Treaty arranged by Mr. Chamberlain with the United States representatives was thrown out by the Senate; and the relations of the two countries in regard to the Canadian Fisheries have had to be regulated by the informal *modus vivendi* which had been agreed on in view of that expected episode. He had prated much of the need for a good understanding between Britain and the

¹ Mee, p. 129.

¹ *Foreign and Colonial Speeches*, 1897, p. 13

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

United States, but as in home affairs, so in international, he could not bend his passions to the acceptance of the only course which can admit of such an understanding throughout the two populations. Knowing that there is an anti-Irish party in the States as in Britain, he was fain rather to harp on the "English" heredity and tradition, appealing to the fatal spirit of "race" to solve the very crux that it had created by its persistence.

On his return to England in 1888 he had a moment of suspension of hostilities. Entertained in April at a non-party house-dinner of the Devonshire Club, with Lord Granville in the chair, he expressed himself as "glad to see so many of my old colleagues and friends and fellow-workers, from whom I am *temporarily dissociated* by a difference which I regret as much as they can do," adding that, "in spite of divergences of the most important character upon political and domestic questions, there is no intermission of the personal regard and goodwill—(cheers)—which has been cemented by a long previous acquaintance."¹ But this was merely one of the formal insincerities of English public life; the "temporary dissociation" was to be permanent.

For a time he professed to hope to constitute a party which should be independent of Conservatism. In the autumn of 1888 he put forward the old and vain suggestion of a "national" party, "a party which is greater than all other parties—a

party of the nation, a party which shall have national interests, national security, and national faith as the only watchwords to which it owes its existence."¹ It was the old device of Bolingbroke, clutching at any reed in his desperate desire to return to power—a device which was presumably remembered by Dr. Johnson when he affirmed that "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." In Bolingbroke's case, indeed, the device was partly plausible, precisely because he had no ground of specific policy on which to stand. In Chamberlain's case it was the merest futility. A new party can arise only in virtue of a policy, which must be defined by a programme; and he had no programme that he could avow save "maintenance of the Union," which was the most vociferated watchword of Conservatism. Had he spoken of any constructive reform, he would be endangering the understanding between Tories and Liberal Unionists. He had taken up a position in which he could do nothing for any of his former progressive ideals to which he might cling; and, standing between the two parties with his back to his old comrades and his face towards his former foes, he could but urge, with prudent strategy, that it was "not desirable that the Liberal Unionist party should be absolutely identified and confounded with the Conservative party. It is desirable to maintain a distinction."² It

¹ Mee, p. 125. Cp. *Speeches on the Irish Question*, 1890, pp. 42, 93.

² Mee, p. 124.

¹ *Foreign and Colonial Speeches*, 1897, p. 21.

clearly was, for his purposes. The Liberal-Unionist party was the lever by which he could at length force his way into the Tory Cabinet.

On the Irish question he appealed brazenly to the lowest forms of racial passion. In his Belfast speech of October 12th, 1887, he explicitly stands for the ascendancy of the non-Irish race in Ireland :—

There are two races in Ireland; and when it is proposed to put a race which has shown all the qualities of a *dominant people*, which has proved, in the history of the world, that *it can justify the ascendancy that it has secured*—when it is proposed to put that race under the other, which, whatever its merits may be, has always failed in the qualities which compel success—(cheers)—I say that that is an attempt against nature—(loud cheers)—an attempt which all history and all experience show must of necessity fail, and can only lead to disaster and confusion.¹

Thus in the very act of charging on Home Rulers a design of racial domination, a design which they always repudiated, he avowed that his own ideal was precisely such a dominance, and that on his side it was its own justification. Seldom in modern times has iniquity been so insolently acclaimed.

Meantime, the fomentor of racial hates rang the changes on the one non-negative theme on which he was free to speak, sounding more and more strongly the note of popular claptrap, to the tune of race, the heritage of empire, imperial federation, the dominant Anglo-Saxon, and all the rest of it. In every perora-

tion of that period the “mighty Empire” is the theme. What he had *once* called “the noisy Jingoism of the music-halls” became half his stock-in-trade. In 1885, commenting on the report that there had been rejoicing in Alexandria at the fall of the Gladstone Government, he had spoken the truth about the forces which had brought about the British intervention. “It seems to me perfectly natural that the horde of foreign stock-holders and financial adventurers, whose rapacity we have vainly striven to restrain, should be exultant at the prospect of a change”; and again he alluded to “those persons in Egypt who make their profit out of a foreign occupation and military expeditions.”¹ In a speech to the West Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association in March of 1890, after a visit to Egypt, he announced :—

I am going to make a confession. I admit I was one of those—I think my views were shared by the whole Cabinet of Mr. Gladstone—who regretted the necessity for the occupation of Egypt. When the occupation was forced upon us, I looked forward with anxiety to an early, it might be even to an immediate, evacuation. ~ The confession I have to make is that, having seen what are the results of the occupation, I have changed my mind.²

Such were the kinds of change that had become easy to him. He still talked, indeed, of the need “to rise to the full height of our duty, and complete our work *before we*

¹ *Speeches*, 1885, pp. 150-1 (speech of June 17th, 1885).

² *Foreign and Colonial Speeches*, 1901, pp. 41-42.

¹ *Speeches on the Irish Question*, 1890, p. 55.

leave the country"; but nothing more was to be heard of the last clause. By this time he was quite ready for a full alliance with Toryism.

In the summer of 1889 he had sneered¹ at "the people—the people with a capital P"—the same people whom he had harangued and extolled in the recent days of his popularity with them when he had enraged Lord Salisbury by invoking the "opinion of the streets." He, for whom "construction" had come to mean a mere blatant arraying of "Anglo-Saxon" racial instinct against the racial instinct inflamed in Irishmen by British misgovernment, proceeded to explain that the Radicals of 1889, the men whom he had incited in 1885, were merely "destructive in their aims and objects, with not the slightest constructive capacity—in short, nothing more nor less than the Nihilists of English politics."²

In 1890 his animosity included the entire Liberal party, without distinction of sections. Addressing his adherents on the opening of a Liberal Unionist Club at Birmingham, he declared that they were "emphasising our separation from the Gladstonian Liberals"; and after explaining how they had refused "at the bidding of one imperious leader to desert the principles and be false to the pledges of a lifetime," he proclaimed that "Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule policy was conceived in secrecy, was born in deceit, and it

has been nurtured on evasion. (Cheers and laughter.) No one has been found, not even a personal friend or a colleague, to say that Mr. Gladstone gave him the slightest intimation of his change of front before the election of 1885."¹

In 1893 Lord Salisbury, in effect, repeated this assertion at Belfast. Its measure of veracity may be settled once for all by comparing it with this testimony of Lord Hartington, delivered in his speech to the Eighty Club on March 5th, 1886:—

I think no one who has read or heard during a long series of years the declarations of Mr. Gladstone on the question of self-government in Ireland can be surprised at the tone of his present declaration.....When I look back to those declarations which Mr. Gladstone made in his place in Parliament, which have not been infrequent; when I look to the increased definiteness which was given to those declarations in his address to the electors of Midlothian, and in his Midlothian speeches; when I look to the announcements which—however unauthorised and inaccurate—have never been asserted to be, and could not have been, mere figments of the imagination.....I say, when we consider all these things, I feel that I have not, and that no one else has, any right whatever to complain of the declarations which Mr. Gladstone has recently made on this subject.²

In a previous chapter we have cited some examples of the utterances in question, which must have been known to Mr. Chamberlain, of all men. Thus there forces itself on us the question: Was he or was he not

¹ Mee, p. 125.

² *Ibid.*, p. 126. Cp. *Speeches on the Irish Question*, 1890, pp. 43, 197–8.

¹ *Speeches on the Irish Question*, pp. 252–4.

² Cited by P. W. Clayden, *England Under the Coalition*, 1892, pp. 27–28.

consciously telling an untruth in his Birmingham speech in 1890? Let us take the "charitable" view and assume that he had undergone a failure of memory: to what conclusion are we led? To this, that part of his very mental structure had gone by the board in those years of poisonous rancour; that he had parted not merely with ideals but with some of the stuff of his personality—some of that essential matter of remembrance which is vital to a politician's efficiency or to a private man's rectitude. The man who could thus obviously allege what normal recollection should have flatly contradicted for him has, on the most favourable view, gone some distance on the road to moral imbecility. Rabid virulence had induced a form of mental atrophy.

And this begins to emerge for us as the scientific inference from his career thus far. Take an energetic and prejudiced Radical: put him in bitter personal revolt against his former colleagues; deprive him of the class sympathies which had put him on the side of progress, humanity, betterment; and destroy part of his most intimate knowledge, his most matter-of-course reminiscence of men and measures—do this, and you get the clay from which may be moulded a congenial leader of Conservatism.

But of some of his performances in the latter years of his middle period it is hardly possible to believe that they are the result of failure of memory. If such they were, the failure would have been of a kind calling for medical super-

vision of the subject. On grounds of simple common sense, we are forced to impute collapse of another kind.

It will be remembered that one of Mr. Chamberlain's early miscarriages as member of a Liberal Cabinet was his failure to carry his Bill for the protection of merchant seamen. His action in that matter had in fact alienated some capitalists from the Liberal party. But in a speech delivered at Sunderland in October, 1891, when he had made it his business to vilify Liberalism in general and in particular, we find him joining hands with some of those very seceders, now become Liberal Unionists, on the score that his Merchant Shipping Bill had never been properly supported by the Liberal party. It is one of the strangest exhibitions of political bad faith in the modern period. Mr. Gladstone, he declared, had given him very little support; the other Liberal leaders had been incompetent or unsympathetic; and the Bill in consequence had had to be withdrawn. And this specific assertion was accompanied by the general assertion that "for social legislation it cannot be denied that, looking to their past history, the Conservatives, especially when assisted and supported by the Liberal Unionists, are eminently qualified. It cannot be denied that to the Conservative party belongs the credit for almost all the social legislation of the time."

On the general assertion it is sufficient here to remark, as was remarked by many at the time, that,

if Mr. Chamberlain spoke the truth in 1891, his whole political utterance down to 1886 had been one shameless slander of his opponents. We have seen how he characterised them in 1885: they were selfish, cynical, obstructive, and incapable. And in his speech at Hull in August of 1885, with the facts fresh in his memory, he had thus described the treatment of his Merchant Shipping Bill by the Tory party:—

When I introduced the Merchant Shipping Bill, I introduced it as a measure which was outside and above all party considerations. I thought that all men, whatever the political faith to which they might give their adhesion, were at least at one in desiring the welfare and security of the men to whom we owe so much as we do to the British sailors. Well, I was disappointed. *I received no assistance from the Tory party.* When it was found that the shipowners in Parliament and the representatives of shipping interests were about to oppose this Bill, the Tory party were unable to resist the temptation of putting the Government in the minority.....There were some exceptions, but, speaking generally, I learned very soon that the Tory party as a whole would go against the Bill, and would do all they could to render its passing impossible; and the leader of the party, the Marquis of Salisbury, on more than one occasion, took up the cause of the shipowners, denounced me for my efforts, accused me of having brought a horrible and fantastic charge against the shipowners, and did all in his power to stimulate the opposition to the proposals I had made.....I made every effort to conciliate my opponents. I was willing to make great concessions, much greater than I myself approved of, but all failed. The opposition was continuous and persistent, and it became necessary to drop the Bill.

Once more, if Mr. Chamberlain spoke the truth in 1891, ten years after the episode in question, he must have been wilfully doing otherwise in 1885; and as regards the general verdict on his character it matters little which deliverance we hold to have been dishonest. If, again, we are to suppose that the assertion of 1891 was made in oblivion of the facts, his character gains little; for the most obvious duty of a responsible publicist who undertakes to review the past is to refresh his memory from the public records of his own and other men's testimony. There is, in fact, no escape from the conclusion that in Chamberlain's speeches of 1891 we are dealing with a man intellectually depraved.

The clearest proof of this has yet to be noticed. In the same Sunderland speech of 1891 we find Mr. Chamberlain proceeding to attack the foreign policy of the Gladstone Government of which he had been a member, extolling in comparison that of the Government of Lord Salisbury, under which, he declared, "There have been no costly expeditions: there have been no votes of credit swallowing up millions. I wish I could say as much of the Government that preceded." And he added: "If I could consider only the interests of the party to which I belong, I would wish nothing better than that Mr. Gladstone should have the majority for which he asks, and that he should be allowed once more to show what an awful mess he would make of our affairs."

If there be any room for dubiety over the preceding issues, there can be none over this. Either Mr. Chamberlain had been deeply dissatisfied with Mr. Gladstone's foreign policy while he served under him, or the attack of 1891 was a stroke of sheer political turpitude. If, on the other hand, he had been opposed to Mr. Gladstone's policy down to 1885, his own declarations of that year were those of a conscienceless dissembler. Not by a single word had he ever indicated dissent from the policy of his colleagues. On the contrary, he had toured the country extolling Mr. Gladstone as no Minister had ever been extolled by a colleague before; and he had accepted, as he was morally bound to do, the fullest responsibility for every act of the Cabinet of which he had been a member. At the same time he had pointed with denunciation to the policy of the previous Conservative Government, at whose fall in 1880, he declared, "there was trouble all over the world. South Africa was in a state of anarchy; there had been war, shortly to be renewed, in Afghanistan;.....the finances were in hopeless confusion." Finally, instead of indicating, in the autumn of 1885, any dissatisfaction with the foreign policy of the Liberal Government which had just left office, he had eagerly taunted the Tories with homologating its action when they came into power:—

During the last five years hardly a day has passed in which some member of the Tory party has not, either in the House of Commons or upon a platform,

fulminated against the weakness and vacillation of the late Government, has not accused us of having ignored the interests of the country, of having humiliated its pride, of having injured its integrity. Well, now they are in office, have you perceived any change?Why, gentlemen, both in Egypt and Afghanistan, the Tories have meekly adopted our policy as far as they are able, and they are defending it in language which might be used by Lord Granville and Lord Kimberley. On the whole, I suppose, we may regard this servile imitation with gratification.

If this were the language of deliberate deceit in 1885, it would matter little what was the measure of sincerity in the attack of 1891. But when we compare that with the later policy of the accuser, in concert with his Conservative colleagues, we are dispensed from arguing the hypothesis that he was then reverting to his real opinions. He was merely turning his back on his own past policy as no British statesman had ever done in his day, casting honour and decency to the winds in the intensity of his hate. Mr. Morley was well within the mark when he said, a few days later, that this aspersion, by a statesman, of old colleagues, for a policy in which he had fully shared, was "a hitting below the belt to which you will find no parallel in the worst times of our political history."

"Hitting below the belt" is indeed too mild a description for an act of sheer baseness. Before such a spectacle it is impossible to fall back on euphemisms. A man may in all honesty so change his opinions

as to be led to deride what he once applauded; but it is not honesty that leads any man alternately to applaud and to denounce any policy whatever according as it is embraced or rejected by those with whom he happens to be for the moment in accord. And while we retain the machinery of law for the exposure and prosecution of men who deceive their fellows for pecuniary gain, it would be acting more in their spirit than in that of a scrupulous ethic to dismiss with terms of deprecatory platitude the unpunished deceiver who plies his craft for ends of political power, on the motive not of gain but of malice, libelling his old associates in order to cover his own treachery.

From this stage it is out of the question to deal with Chamberlain as a sincere politician. If "sincerity" can yield such fruits, the term "insincerity" ceases to be an aspersion: it would conceivably be better to be insincere than to be sincere. We have simply to reckon with a politician who, beginning life as a Radical on motives of class prejudice, had at the age of fifty revolted from Liberalism on motives of personal rancour, and embraced the cause which for twenty-five years he had reviled. It remains to sum up briefly the evil achieved and the further evil attempted in that final period of unscrupulous self-seeking.

CHAPTER X.

CONSUMMATION

WHEN, in 1895, Chamberlain took office in the new Conservative administration, he began the last and, whatever were his purposes, the most mischievous period of his public life. To him, doubtless, is owing much of the special malignity of the anti-Irish temper which came into English affairs from 1886 onwards; but that temper existed earlier; and the so-called "Unionist" movement which it inspired would doubtless have arisen without him. What lies specially at his door is the

responsibility for the sins of the new movement of vulgar and vicious "Imperialism," which dates broadly from the time of his appearance as a Tory Minister.

That movement, in turn, is of course of earlier origin. It can be seen taking shape under Beaconsfield in the later 'seventies, when the song, "We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do!" added a new and useful term to the vocabulary of our politics. At that period, it will be remembered, Mr. Chamberlain

spoke scornfully of "the noisy Jingoism of the music-halls." Beaconsfield, with his somewhat precarious shrewdness, had seen that a movement of sane popular enthusiasm, such as had given Gladstone his power in 1868, could best be fought not by mere opposition, but by exploiting a different order of popular sentiment; and he took to belligerent patriotism, with a measure of success which revealed to many the survival of a danger they had fondly supposed to be overpast. He himself believed that by his tactic he had excluded his great rival from power for twenty years. But it is in the nature of the triumphs wrought through national folly to be short-lived; and Beaconsfield's aggressive Imperialism was overborne and overthrown by the main power of Gladstone in one great campaign.

What Chamberlain has latterly achieved in popular prestige has been won by way of renewing Beaconsfield's tactics. He, in turn, at length saw that the tide of humane enthusiasm evoked by Gladstone's attempt to heal the age-long wounds of Ireland could be successfully turned only by exploiting some more agreeable emotion than that of mere hate towards the Irish; and already in his middle period we have seen him tentatively appealing to "imperial" enthusiasm in an anti-Irish connection. After taking office in 1895, that became his guiding principle; and inasmuch as even a Tory at the Colonial Office cannot with comfort abuse continually a race which is pretty largely repre-

sented in Australia, the negative side of his latter-day gospel became less prominent than the positive, such as it was.

The public circumstances, too, were all in his favour. Liberalism, after the retirement and death of Gladstone, suffered in quick succession from the divisions which in political life always tend to follow on a great period of one-man leadership; and the Irish party was in still worse case. Thus the new appeal to vulgar ideals was not met as that of Beaconsfield had been, by a stark resistance from any authoritative propounder of better ideals; and, for lack of a positive and constructive policy on the side of the Liberal leaders, the rant of Imperialism began to pass for a gospel. A thoughtful observer could have seen that Chamberlain's day was opening in 1897, when the celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee served to reveal the simple vacuity of the general mind in the matter of political philosophy. It was the apotheosis of national non-intelligence. Months of mental stagnation prepared for a mere glorified circus-procession. An immense popular demonstration was accomplished without calling up a single civic ideal worth thinking over; and for the first time the latter-day British Empire was definitely and monumentally associated with symbols of mere quantity, number, size, dominion, and riches. It was idle to suggest in such a connection the idea of an era of world-wide liberty. Nearly everything in

which the procession differed from an ordinary march-past stood for servitude. The bulk of the population of the "Empire," even in the loose geographical sense, were the races of India, wholly stripped of the semblance of self-government. The people of the self-governing colonies, grandiosely reckoned as "Empire," were a handful in comparison. And still the situation had to be treated as inexpressibly glorious.

This was clearly Mr. Chamberlain's period. And already he had gone far to bring in the reign of crime and folly in which the nineteenth century was to close and the twentieth to open. Very soon after taking office he must have begun to be entangled in the toils laid for him by Cecil Rhodes, in whom the British people had been assiduously taught to see its Great Modern Man, forasmuch as he had contrived the addition to the Empire's area of so many thousands of square miles of uncivilised but auriferous territory, and was likely still further to determine the tints of some of the maps of the twentieth-century atlas. The dynamic motive in the whole cultus was simply the lust of riches, concretely moving the plotters of Johannesburg, and abstractly the landless British people, fooled by the claptrap of Imperialism into counting the paper simulacrum of national possession the equivalent of the substance.

Only for those whom experience cannot teach is there now any obscurity as to the motive and management of the Jameson Raid.

The gold-masters of the Rand, seeking on the one hand, by deep-level mining, to obtain larger returns from the mines already open, and on the other hand to float yet others in the home market, sought from the Boer Government such legislation as should force Kaffir labour into the mines at rates much below those of the open labour market. This is the plain purport of all the allusions by them and by Rhodes to the need for "facilities" in the way of native labour. While a pretence of "shortage" was kept up by actually refusing offers to supply any number of native labourers at current wages,¹ leading representatives of the gold-masters openly calculated the amounts that could be added to dividends—two-and-a-half millions for one company alone—by forcing wages down.² The refusal of the Boer Government to use any fresh legislative compulsion in the matter was the chief grievance of the capitalists and the main motive of their provocative action.

It was known, further, that even at that date they proposed as an alternative to import Asiatic labour;³ and there is a decided stamp of truth on the statement that, when Kruger refused both demands, the gold-masters protested that, if they were not met, they could no longer work

¹ See the testimony of Mr. E. B. Rose, *The Truth about the Transvaal*, 1902, p. 153.

² J. A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, 1900, pp. 229-240. Cp. Methuen, *Peace or War in South Africa*, stereo. ed., pp. 29-30.

³ Hobson, p. 231.

the mines, and that he returned the fitting answer, "Vacate the mines, and I will work them on behalf of the State." From that stage was decreed the evolution which has now established virtual slave labour in the Rand under the flag of the "free" Empire.

The first move of the plotters was to agitate for "political rights"; and the British people, besotted by its new creed, actually believed in the mass that a gang of denationalised gold-masters and stock-jobbers aspired above all things to confer the franchise on a population of working miners. It was at this stage that Mr. Chamberlain lent himself, a fitting tool, to the knavish enterprise historically associated with the name of Dr. Jameson. In his speech in Parliament on May 8th, 1896, he had declared that "to make war on the Boers in order to wrest from them the desired reforms would be unwise and immoral"; but he had actually consented to traffic in an immorality which differed from that of open war only as midnight burglary differs from open robbery with violence. Despite the official finding of the Commission which inquired into the episode—nay, all the more because of the peculiar fashion in which that finding was reached—it is impossible for any outside inquirer to doubt that the Colonial Secretary was fully implicated in the whole piratical plan—that is to say, that he knew a military raid was contemplated; and that his only serious demurrers took the shape of stipulations that the

truth should be concealed.¹ Any other interpretation of the matter is either fantastic or childish. That Rhodes deliberately deceived his own colleagues in the Cape Government is certain; and he may well have partially deceived Chamberlain. But that the telegrams withheld from the inquiry were not compromising, and that Chamberlain's public vindication of the man whom the Commission had pronounced a wilful liar was an uncoerced show of sympathy, is now to be believed only by judges whose belief need not be argued against.

As to Chamberlain's relation to the Raid, finally, we have a very sufficient light in his own published despatch of January 7th, 1896, proposing to send a large force to the Cape "to provide for all eventualities"; and in the further despatch to Kruger (after Sir Hercules Robinson had dissuaded him from sending an armed force) menacing the President with the worst consequences from his refusal to accord complete Home Rule to Johannesburg. He had clearly determined on the further coercion of the Transvaal; and on his head, whatever may be the share apportioned to Lord Milner, history will first lay the official guilt of the miserable war which followed within three years. It was he who, on behalf of the British Government, took the first step to the crowning crime. And it was he who, by his

¹ See the particulars colligated in G. H. Perris's pamphlet, *Blood and Gold in South Africa*, 1902, pp. 42-45; and the *Hawkesley* and other letters published by the *Independence Belge*, rep. by Mr. Rose, pp. 120-123.

utterly nefarious insistence on the maintenance of the claim of British "suzerainty"—which had been expressly abandoned in the Transvaal Convention of 1884, entered into by a Government of which he was a member—took the second decisive step on the same evil path. After he had prepared the whole train of calamity by insisting on the cancelled suzerainty, Lord Salisbury, in the Upper House, avowed that in 1884 Mr. Kruger "made considerable territorial and other sacrifices" to secure the abandonment of the earlier claim. Mr. Chamberlain was simply committing the nation to a stroke of treachery.

After that act of open iniquity—denounced by the chief law officer among his colleagues as a breach of national faith¹—any enormities were possible. It is still questioned by some whether Chamberlain really brought about the war. It is privately told on good authority that he counted on a peaceful solution; that he privately laid the blame of the war on Milner when the outbreak came; that he believed the Boers would never fight, and so forth. All such arguments end in aggravating his guilt. His own avowal, latterly given to the world by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, that in the summer of 1899 he and his colleagues were "playing a game of bluff," only proves that his folly was equal to his bad faith. That, of course, holds true of the great mass

of those who forced on the war. With hardly an exception they lusted to invade the Transvaal because they believed the Boers could or would make no serious resistance. Had it not been that the Boers, with the usual impolicy of the military instinct, themselves became the invaders, the Transvaal would certainly have been entered by an insufficient but self-confident British force, which would in all likelihood have been annihilated. In respect of this self-sufficiency the bulk of the nation was at one; and Mr. Chamberlain was not the misleader or deceiver of an innocent and well-meaning people. But on his head lies the official guilt of the whole miserable evolution. And if he really felt any distress when Lord Milner's folly precipitated the conflict, his later pronouncement that the war, if of his making, would be "a feather in his cap," gives the measure of his final depravation. Such words could come only from a politician in whom all faculty for high-minded statesmanship was gone. And such in reality was the man whose inner development we have thus far traced.

It is not the business of the historian, as such, to trace all the possible processes by which the Colonial Secretary in 1899 may have passed from characteristic miscalculation to a no less characteristic effrontery of self-defence. There stands on record, once for all, the passages of dialogue between Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Courtney and Sir E. Clarke, on October 19th,

¹ Sir E. Clarke, speech of October 19th, 1899. The later pusillanimity of Sir E. Clarke does not affect his earlier testimony.

1899. In that brief discussion Mr. Chamberlain was driven to admit that what he had put as a refusal of the Boer proposals, and what was by the whole world regarded as such a refusal, was intended by him "as a qualified acceptance. We did not accept everything, but we accepted at least nine-tenths of the whole."

It was over the remaining fraction that the two races went to war, Mr. Chamberlain conducting affairs. "You said nine-tenths," urged Mr. Courtney; "is the one-tenth worth war? Tell us what the one-tenth is." "I do not think it was worth war," was the reply. Again Mr. Courtney demanded: "Tell us what the one-tenth is." And the sole answer of Mr. Chamberlain was: "Why did not President Kruger give way?" Thoughtfully considered, the imbecile obstinacy revealed in that answer is the most appalling spectacle in modern history. It meant three years of desperate war; the subjection of fifty thousand human beings, half of them women and children, to wounds, disease, slaughter, or premature death; the destruction of well-nigh the whole property of the two Boer States; the manifold demoralisation of half the people of Britain; and the disgracing of Britain in the eyes of the civilised world.

Recently, in his speech at Gainsborough on February 1st, 1905, Mr. Chamberlain, alluding to the sad death of his own daughter, said, movingly enough, that he had suffered "one of those blows in face of which all ordinary human sympa-

thies sink into insignificance." But while thousands of his fellow-creatures were suffering such blows; while the Boer mothers were seeing their children perish before their eyes in feverous camps, he could say that the war, if of his making, was a "feather in his cap."

Some sense of the deadliness of his handiwork seems to have come to him in his tour through South Africa in 1903, from which he returned with a ridiculous financial treaty whereby the mineowners of Johannesburg were ostensibly to provide some fraction of the cost of the war—a treaty not worth the paper on which it was written. Speaking in the House after his return, he vouchsafed, as a result of his personal study of Transvaal history, the avowal that in regard to the natives "the Boers must be absolved from the charge of ill-treatment or violent misconduct." And yet, speaking in the same House in October, 1899, he had made the charge of such misconduct a main part of his case against the Transvaal Government. "Sir," he then declared, "the treatment of the natives of the Transvaal has been disgraceful. It has been brutal. It has been unworthy of a civilised Power." And it was on the strength of such charges, now admitted to be false, that he had the backing of tens of thousands of his fellow-countrymen in his policy. To know that he had thus led them into an unrighteous war, and still to hold his head high and prate of his services to the empire—could this be possible to a

statesman in whom the very stuff of conscience was not tainted?

The rest of the South African sequel has been all of a piece. The "case" on which the war was wrought for and provoked may be summarised under four heads: (1) Ill-treatment of natives by the Boers; (2) outrages against British inhabitants by the Boers; (3) withholding of the franchise; (4) unjust treatment of British Indian subjects. The first item, we have seen, is an admitted falsity; the second has silently disappeared from discussion; what shall we say of the third? Had Mr. Kruger's proposals been agreed to, the franchise would to-day have been in operation in the Transvaal. As it is, not only is there no franchise whatever, but the very men who engineered the whole propaganda which led up to the war have shown, what all rational men knew, that a fair franchise was precisely what they dreaded most—that they had pushed Mr. Chamberlain on his evil path in fear lest a franchise should be agreed upon. And in place of a self-governing community the Transvaal is now ruled by a plutocracy, who have secured the partial re-establishment of slavery under the British flag as a means to their own enrichment. After a war over the waging of which pious people were led to salve their consciences with the plea that under that flag natives would be humanely ruled, there has been set up by the victors a new Asiatic inferno of nameless vice and brutalisation. All men know that, had

Chinese slave-labour been admitted by the Boer Government, its act would have been denounced in England by the very majority who shouted for a war to prevent the imaginary ill-usage of the native races; and Mr. Chamberlain would have led the denunciation. He and his colleagues made it part of their case, as above noted, that British Indians were oppressed under the Boer rule. They knew perfectly well that the oppression was called for by the British Outlanders themselves; and to-day we see a worse oppression practised, in the same interest, under the administration of Lord Milner.

It is said by Mr. Chamberlain's friends that he is "disappointed" by that turn of events—another of the apologies which are indictments. It may well have been in a sickened recoil from the shameless falsification of all their joint pretences by Lord Milner that Mr. Chamberlain, in 1903, turned from the whole problem of South Africa to beat a new drum, and rouse, as best he could, a new excitement that should make men forget the old. By adjuring his countrymen to "think imperially," he hoped to bring back to his new campaign the tide of passion on which he had floated for three years. And he was so far justified in such a hope that he had around him the middle-class and no-class populace who bellowed his praises throughout the war; and above all his congenial populace of Birmingham, who, when Mr. Lloyd George ventured among them to condemn their leader's policy,

outdid all the ruffianism of the Aston Riots in their efforts to break up his meeting. On the face of the case Mr. George had then been in danger of his life; and still Mr. Chamberlain had had nothing but condonation for his "constituents."

Could he but have renewed the madness of 1899, he and half of those who then acclaimed him would

to-day be meting out their favourite measure to all who gainsay them. But this time the spell has failed. He who could obsess the people in 1899, could but rouse the bulk of them against him in 1903. To-day Mr. Chamberlain is the most hopelessly discredited statesman of modern times. And still no man can say what depth of failure he may reach.

CHAPTER XI.

COLLAPSE

THE latest stage in Mr. Chamberlain's career is well fitted to be the last. Not even from the depraved conspirator of 1896, and the swaggering wrecker of the two Boer Republics, could the most cynical of political prophets have looked for the long-drawn, roaring farce of his "Protectionist" propaganda. In the way of shouting charlatanism there has been nothing like it in British political history since the career of his namesake, Hugh Chamberlayne, familiar to the reader of Macaulay. And though the breed of gulls who came to the first Chamberlayne's call is far from being extinct, it is not rash to predict that this last device of our own arch-plotter will consummate his political overthrow as it consummates his intellectual dissolution. It is not many years since, presiding at a meeting of his Liberal Unionist faction, he charac-

teristically gave it out as decisive of Gladstone's political merits that he "broke up the Liberal party." If that be political damnation, Mr. Chamberlain has earned a place in the lowest circle of the historic Inferno. After doing his own modest part in breaking up the Liberal party, he has within one year of a complete ostensible triumph contrived to break up alike the Liberal Unionist party and the Conservative party with which it had coalesced.

It is only fair, indeed, to note that before he sprung his mine his colleagues had gone far to achieve their own destruction. The beginning of their end was their Education Bill of 1902. While that masterpiece of reaction was being forced through Parliament, Mr. Chamberlain, to whose fiercest convictions of twenty years ago it was

an elaborate insult, was tactfully journeying to and from the scene of his triumphs in South Africa. Challenged by his exasperated Non-conformist backers at Birmingham to stand by them in resisting such an outrage on their denominational rights, he had for answer only an adjuration to remember that, if the Government were turned out, the Home Rulers would get in. For himself, he made the unashamed avowal that, having found long ago that the majority of his countrymen were opposed to his ideal of secular education, he had decided not to waste his life in fighting for the unattainable.

It was clear that something must be done if the Conservative fortunes were to be retrieved; and the choice of policy made by Chamberlain is significant at once of the completeness of his debasement and the destruction of his judgment. The last is the most instructive aspect of the matter. For over seven years he had been seeking to trade as a statesman, not on any plan of rational reform, but on the mere sentiment of Imperialism, the political hysteria which in untrained minds arises on any stimulus of flag-waving clap-trap, any appeal to racial vanity. Now, to trade in that sort of clap-trap is not good for any man's judgment. To rely continuously on the support of popular hysteria in politics is to get out of touch with political common-sense, to become a "demagogue" of the worst kind, and to incur the worst risks of the profession. All this Chamberlain had

done. For years he had not delivered a rational speech. The due result was that, when he staked his chances on a crowning treason to the doctrines of the first fifty years of his life, he excited even more derision than disgust. The self-stultifying series of his pronouncements and pretences is not to be matched in the whole history of statesmanship; it is a new revelation of effrontery or folly, or of both.

His opening declaration was that only some special sort of Imperial Customs Union could "hold the Empire together"—the Empire which for so many years he had been extolling as the most powerfully cemented fabric of the kind in all history. On the face of the case, he was reverting to one of his tentatives of 1896-7, when he desperately discussed, with Colonial Ministers and colleagues, the question of an Imperial Zollverein, and could make no headway with it. Now, the idea of a Zollverein was proposed to be turned to the needs of revenue, a sufficiently serious preoccupation for a Tory Ministry that was still responsible for unremitted war taxes. To "hold the Empire together" we were to put a tax on our imports of foreign food, by way of giving a preferential advantage to Canada.

The mere promulgation of the scheme evoked a storm that would have staggered a far sincerer schemer; and in a few weeks' time the farce of adaptations was in full play. Within a month of his declaration for a policy of taxing food imports solely by way of "holding

the Empire together," our charlatan had shifted his ground, and was approaching a policy of taxing manufactured imports. Within another month he was being actively backed by men who not only argued for the latter policy irrespective of any advantage to be given to the colonies, but proposed in his name alterations in taxation which not only could not benefit the colonies, but, on their own showing, would benefit our commercial rivals.

In the *Daily Telegraph* we were already being told, further, by an inspired penman, that Mr. Chamberlain proposed "readjustments" to balance the food tax—readjustments which were to include a reduction of the tobacco duty by £2,000,000, and also a removal of taxation from tea and sugar to bread and meat; this at the very time that Mr. Chamberlain was forcing a rise of price in sugar, in the nominal interests of Free Trade, and for the maintenance of the "Empire" in the West Indies. In vain bewildered traders point out that, on the Protectionist's own showing, to reduce the tobacco duty would be to benefit not the colonies, but the United States. It was not a trifle of that kind that could arrest the renegade in his last stages of tergiversation. One of his first strokes of naked imposture in furtherance of his new policy had been the announcement that the revenue to be raised by the food-taxes which were to hold the Empire together would be devoted to providing Old-Age Pensions for the workers. Within a month that item in the

scheme had likewise been amended by the "adjustments" which were to leave no surplus revenue whatever. For consolation, the workers were still left the valuable assurance that, if the cost of living *were* increased for them, their wages would be sure to rise at the same time. And the measure of the honesty of that particular proclamation was all the while made clear by the avowal that not even to hold the Empire together would taxes be laid on imports of raw material. Mr. Chamberlain retained just sanity enough to realise that, since taxes on raw material would raise the cost of production, while taxes on food would not (*i.e.*, would *not* be followed by a rise of wages), he had better conciliate the manufacturers and let the Empire shift for itself.

And still the farce went on. In the opening speeches of his egregious campaign of 1903, Mr. Chamberlain intimated that, in return for the boon of differential preference which he proposed to bestow on the colonial syndicates of the provision trades, he would expect the colonies to abstain from opening up new forms of competitive manufacturers. Instantly there came a roar of refusal from the Empire-sustaining Imperialists of Canada; and in due course came the issue of Mr. Chamberlain's "Tariff" speeches, with the stipulation in question dutifully deleted. And then occurred the crowning exhibition of moral quality on the part of the saviour of the Empire. Mr. Birrell having referred to the utterances vetoed by command of

Canada, Mr. Chamberlain accused him of fabrication.

This was but a dramatic expression of the whole fraudulent propaganda. The first figures which the orator had used were the thrice-exploded statistics of exports based on the three years of inflation, 1872-74; and he has never succeeded in finding to his purpose any others which will bear a moment's investigation. The elaborate Blue Book prepared by the Board of Trade officials at his own instance the arch-agitator has had absolutely to ignore: its figures are, indeed, a mere armoury for his opponents. When cooked statistics were found to fail, and his small powers of research gave out, he resorted to still more congenial weapons. To the false accounts of Cobden's doctrine which have always been current among Protectionists he added some grosser misrepresentations than they had ever ventured on. All the while it rained refutations from a roused Liberalism; every subterfuge was exposed on the instant—the true quotations hurled against the false, the relevant figures against the irrelevant; and, save for personalities and claptrap, the sole answer from the confuted schemer was the fatuous declaration, "I pledge myself," sung as a music-hall chorus by fit voices.

It was not surprising that, as against the deepening chorus of derision and contempt, the former accomplices of the doomed politician soon began to keep an embarrassed silence, as of men who saw their friend striding to destruction.

When the story of his fall comes to be written in due perspective, perhaps one of the most outstanding episodes in the record will be that of the speech delivered by the now visibly defeated schemer at Birmingham on May 13th, 1904. After the customary tissue of rhodomontade and insolence came this appeal:—

I ask you to support me in giving these additional powers to the State, in using our opportunities in the first place to benefit the condition of the people, in the second place in order to make permanent the Empire. During the whole of my political life I have had two objects in view. In seeking these objects my methods may sometimes have been inconsistent. It may be difficult sometimes to conciliate words that I have used on different occasions. I have never pretended that I myself can do so. But with regard to those two main objects of my life I have been consistent, and no man can say that I have swerved from them. (Applause.) The first of those objects has been the greatness of my own country—(applause)—and the greatness and the unity and the strength of the Empire of which it forms a part. (Hear, hear.) The second has been the elevation of the masses of the people, the improvement especially of the conditions of the very poor.

The sudden lapse into the semblance of decent sincerity in the sentences italicised will not be forgotten by those who, in following with fitting judgment a pernicious career, have not missed the psychological interest, the moral problem. That one approach to self-realisation in the full flood of claptrap and chicane has almost a tragic significance. Well would it be for the foiled trickster if the moment of self-

perception could have been prolonged, and the avowal of conscious "inconsistency" had been followed by a silent withdrawal from the field, thronged already by all the omens of disaster. But the penalty of a false career has to be paid in due sequence. The confession is salved by fresh claptrap, and the policy of imposture must be followed up to an outwardly determined end. And the end is not yet, though the descent goes on with an almost pitiable precipitance.

In the speech at Preston in January, even hostile listeners found what less hostile onlookers had perceived long before, pathological symptoms. When a belief of that kind had taken the shape of a report that Mr. Chamberlain's long holiday in 1904 had been necessitated by his health, and that there had been no adequate improvement, the right hon. gentleman's secretary had been instructed to say that the report was unfounded, and that doubtless "the wish had been father to the thought." Certainly his enemies have no cause to desire his withdrawal from the political platform by physical infirmity. It is his friends who have reason for such an aspiration. A few weeks before the Preston speech he had seen fit, at Limehouse, to allege that the Liberal leader had accused him of putting forward his Protectionist policy to fill his own pockets. The Liberal leader had, of course, done no such thing: he had simply pointed out that Protectionist proposals always are and always will be supported by those who may hope to gain from Protec-

tion. On the strength of this and other absurd misrepresentations, the "first gentleman of Birmingham" called upon his opponents to "try to behave like gentlemen" and avoid "methods of vulgarity." Men now began to stare. At Preston the same note of neurotic exasperation was sounded in the preliminary protest against the course taken by the Preston manufacturers who had put to him a fair and courteously-worded challenge to explain how his policy would affect their trade in neutral markets, and had very properly sent their letter to the newspapers. Utterly unable to meet their challenge, the cornered statesman complained that the publication of the challenge was "discourteous." Having thus, in the beginning of his speech, snapped at the portion of his audience whom he should have been most concerned to persuade, the "imperial thinker" ended by snapping at his chairman, who had told the audience that the resolution put to them did not commit them to Mr. Chamberlain's policy.

It might have been thought that at this stage friendly or medical persuasion would have withdrawn the unhappy propagandist from his hopeless undertaking. The stolidest of Conservatives is put somewhat out of countenance by the spectacle of the chief railer of the vituperative party, the purloiner of letters, the scold of debate, whose main argument for three years was to shout "Pro-Boer" and "Traitor" at every antagonist; the controversialist who had asserted that the Cobden Club

was supported by foreigners' subscriptions, and, when challenged to an investigation, had neither gone on nor retracted—whimpering to an audience of grown men, "*I never resorted to personalities.*" He had not for many years made a speech without personalities: he was resorting to them in the same breath in which he made the protest. A still lower level, from the point of view of platform practice, was reached in the speech at Gainsborough on the 1st of February. Discoursing there on that prospective "falling-away" of the colonies on which he insists as often as he affirms their unalterable "loyalty," the orator challenged his audience to face the consequences:—

I ask you what would be the first result? How would you feel it?.... You would lose your best customers. (Hear, hear.) You would lose what is called in business your best trade connections. (A Voice: "Sugar," and laughter.) Now, let me appeal to the gentleman who says "Sugar." (Cheers.) Is it possible that he thinks that that question has the slightest conceivable connection with what I am now saying to you? (Cheers.) And if he does not, does he think it courteous to interrupt me? (Renewed cheers.) But if he wants to discuss sugar, let him give me my chance. Let him wait until I have concluded the argument that I want to put before this meeting, and then, if he will come here—(loud cheers)—and talk to you about sugar—(renewed cheers)—I will be only too glad, if the meeting is still patient enough to listen, to give my answer to anything he may have to say. (Cheers.) Meanwhile, I am not going to allow my argument to be broken in upon. (Cheers.)

During the rest of the speech sober-minded people were left to

meditate on the aspect of the demand, "Does he think it courteous to interrupt me?"—as put by the leader whose followers had a hundred times striven, with his tacit consent, to break up other people's meetings by the grossest violence. Any other speaker so visibly put beside himself by a stinging interruption would have won pity from all who might know that he had just suffered a grievous bereavement. But if there ever was a statesman in British history who had in advance deprived himself of normal sympathy, it is the man for whom a monstrous war has been a "feather in his cap." A few weeks before, in characteristically welcoming a popular military band to Birmingham, he had unctuously quoted the verses of Dr. Alexander, Archbishop of Armagh, published in October of 1899. They end thus:—

"I deem it true
That He who made the earthquake
and the storm
Perchance made battles too."

So he could speak before his bereavement. And after it, at Preston, he could thus speak of the war he had brought about in South Africa:—

Now, that war has been called a "stupid" war. Well, I do not understand the adjective. I cannot understand the Englishman who comes down and tells an audience like this that it was a "stupid" war, that these lives were given in vain, that these sacrifices were of no account. But to me the war was a just war. (Cheers.) To me it showed the old British spirit was not dead among us, that we could still look forward to maintain that headship of the British race which we have maintained so long, and which some people have said was

weakening in our hands. Be that as it may, one thing it did. *It gave us experience; it showed us a new vista; for the first time it made possible an organised union of all the different parts of the British Empire for common objects.* Now, if you have followed me, you will see *the time is a critical and a creative time.* I say that the position you have held hitherto cannot be permanently held unless you take your children into your counsels, unless you make the Empire theirs as well as yours.

This in the speech which began with the allusion to "those blows in face of which all ordinary human sympathies sink into insignificance"! Not only in face of such blows, but on less tragical urging, men opposed in politics may well crave to find some grounds of normal sympathy whereon to fraternise as fallible mortals should. But before this spectacle of unteachable error and unrepentant guilt, the instinct of fellowship is repulsed and paralysed. The listener who enraged him by calling out "Sugar" had made, in one word, a pregnant commentary. Even as he has wrecked two peaceful States which never wronged his own, he has already gone far to wreck a great industry at home. It is his insensate policy that has forced his countrymen to buy at famine price what of old they bought cheap, thus doubly embittering the poverty of the poorest in a time of lamentable distress. The statesman who has outgone all others of his day in his avowed desire to mulct and penalise "the foreigner" has achieved the feat of relieving a whole class of foreign producers of their chief obstacles in competition

with those of Britain; has already almost destroyed a whole group of British industries; has thus reduced thousands of workers to starvation; and has, at the same time, enabled the foreigner to capture the markets thus lost. And the sugar-raising industry in the West Indies, to protect and foster which the whole process was set on foot, has not visibly benefited in the slightest degree.

Such are the fruits of the fiscal policy of the demoralised demagogue in the one case in which he has been able to force it on his country, his worthy colleagues abetting him, and, with him, confidently predicting that the average price of sugar would not rise. And he, with the ruin of the sugar-using industries on his head, could cater for the cheers of his dupes at Preston by telling them that "most prophets are false prophets." To use a formula of his own, he ought to be a judge of a false prophet, and no less of a false patriot. And if his countrymen were so far lost to reason as to return him to power, he would swiftly earn from "the wild mob's million feet" the fate that such deceivers earn, haply in the fashion of the higher and not of the lower civilisations.

But his return to power is now the one impossible thing in politics; and it is well for him that it is so. The best close to his career that charity could wish him would be an evening of life passed in retirement, far from the turmoil which warped his character, unseated his judgment, and frustrated all the better aims of his better days.



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